

# PRESS PARADE

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE NEWSPAPER  
RACKET AND THE MILLIONAIRES' ATTEMPT  
AT DICTATORSHIP

BY

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"Taking the Press as a whole, you cannot find any country where the Press is superior to ours, either in quality or extent of its news or in its literary distinction or sense of responsibility . . . its high standard of ability, integrity, and profound patriotism."—*Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 1932.*

"What are their methods [*i.e.* of the Press]? Their methods are direct falsehood, misrepresentation, half-truths, alteration of the speaker's meaning by putting sentences apart from their context, suppression."—*Right Hon. Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister, in 1931.*

LONDON:

WATTS & CO.,

5 & 6 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET      F.C.4

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## CHAPTER I

### “ A BRANCH OF COMMERCE ”

ALONG the streets in the early morning go men and boys, leaving newspapers at many houses. At every railway station an hour or two later bookstall attendants are handing out newspapers to men and women, young and old, who take trains to the city or town where they work.

The same happens at evening ; there stand also at many a street-corner evening-newspaper sellers, doing a brisk trade. Nearly all passengers in trains, trams, or buses read a newspaper. Walk along the front at a seaside place before eleven in the morning. Nine out of every ten of the people sitting there, and a large proportion of the promenaders, have newspapers up to their eyes or hold them in their hands.

Newspaper-reading has become a habit. It is like drug-taking or cigarette-smoking, not caused so much by the pleasure of indulgence in it as by the discomfort of abstention from it. Millions of men and women read newspapers, not for information, but to pass the time, to prevent thinking, to escape from the pressure of boredom or bad luck.

If they meet a friend and find plenty to talk about, they glance only at a few headings. If they have a lot of time on their hands, they read column after column, turn page after page. Of what they read they remember very little. Their minds are a pathetic jumble of statements imperfectly assimilated, facts wrongly interpreted, inferences incorrectly drawn.



Few people take a real interest in news of any kind. They like a murder case, but would as soon read one of twenty years ago as that of yesterday. They are fond of gossip about film stars, but do not much care whether it is true or not. They enjoy being shown that aristocrats are a poor lot, vicious and idle, but are equally ready next day to believe them hard-working, self-sacrificing, patriotic men and women.

You cannot take a step in a town, or even a village of any size, without having the ubiquity of the Press forced on your notice. Both early and late, newspaper contents bills meet the eye. Vans carrying evening papers are conspicuous in the traffic. From nine o'clock in the evening until after midnight, morning-paper lorries are discharging at every main-line railway terminus; special newspaper trains are leaving one after another. Clearly the newspaper trade is one of the largest in the country—a trade, however, which few people know anything about.

Everyone can picture the inside of a cotton-mill, the depths of a coal-mine, the appearance of a shipyard, even the orderly bustle of an engineering shop. Descriptions of them, photographs and drawings of them are common. How many, excepting those who work in newspaper offices, have any idea of what goes on in them?

We all read newspapers: they are among the most familiar elements of our daily lives. Few know anything about their manufacture or have reflected on their influence. In a changing world they are—they have been for almost half a century—the most potent agents of instability. Yet they remain to the mass of us, educated and ignorant alike, mysterious, oracular.

There they are, every day, telling their news,

giving their opinions, foretelling the weather, providing the wireless programmes, advising mother how to make a pudding and her daughter how to look fashionable, offering accident insurance policies, tips for the races, prizes for solving puzzles, help for competitors in football pools. How they get all their information, how it is put together, how they manage just to fill so many pages (that is a frequent source of surprise!), how they can afford to sell books so cheaply, and why they can't leave out some of the advertisements and come down to a handier size, are all questions forming themselves in countless intelligences. Let us take the last first, and see if the answer to it will not throw light on the whole structure of the newspaper and its place in the life of to-day.

"The ideal of modern journalism is the ideal of modern business."—Moberly Bell, former manager of *The Times*, quoted by H. Simonis in *The Street of Ink*.

Most of us are unaware that this place is not the one which the newspaper has always occupied. Changes are seldom perceived by the mass of people until long after they have occurred. Because newspapers were once organs of opinion, there is still an inclination to expect that they will act up to a high standard of conduct, will show a sense of responsibility, will aim at worthier objects than merely commercial prosperity. This is unfair. It betrays a lack of acquaintance with reality. The first requisite towards understanding the Press of to-day is to bear in mind that it is a branch of commerce.

Even a quarter of a century ago Sir Robert Donald,

then Editor of the *Daily Chronicle* and President of the Institute of Journalists, was saying that "the Press had become commercialized." This was not nearly so true then as it is now. He quoted from the London Stock Exchange List a number of newspaper companies, showing that the proprietorial system had almost disappeared. Nine-tenths of the leading newspapers belonged to limited companies, and the main concern of shareholders was their dividend. Dividends must be earned even if principle had to suffer. He did not suggest that personal ownership had been paternal and philanthropic; but, while the private proprietor liked his profit, he had no responsibility towards shareholders and preferred to make less profit rather than compromise with principle.

It is often mistakenly inferred that, when newspapers were organs of opinion, they were not run as businesses. Speaking generally, they were, though now and then someone was willing to spend money on pushing a Party or a principle, either for the good motive or for what a Party would give him in the way of title, place, social influence, or support for some pet enterprise. But they were not run primarily as profit-making concerns.

They had to pay their way, they must if possible provide incomes for their proprietors. That was all. The proprietors did not ask, when they looked around for editors: "Is this or that man likely to make the paper earn more money?" They asked if he were a man who would lend the paper weight and dignity; who would cause its approval to be sought, its censure to be feared; whose political judgment could be trusted.

Newspapers then, as now, contained advertisements,

but these were kept on a lower plane. They were neither numerous nor varied. No effort was made to get them. They helped to produce the favourable balance sheet, but were not the principal object of the paper. In fact, the Press was rather like the Pulpit, which had to provide a living for those who occupied it, but was not regarded as a money-making institution.

I am not saying this kind of Press was better than our kind. I am pointing out the difference and the injustice of forgetting it. Newspapers of fifty years ago were dull, far less informative as well as less entertaining than those of this present age, far more limited in scope and interest. By becoming a branch of commerce, organs of profit instead of organs of opinion, they have lost something; they have also gained much.

A very flourishing branch of commerce they represent; with huge amounts of capital invested in it, with immense payments of dividends, with an enormous wages bill. Profits during the years since the Press became commercial have been spectacular. The company owning three London newspapers, the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening News*, and the *Sunday Dispatch*, paid out in eight years six and a half million pounds, representing 1300 per cent. on the original deferred shares, mostly held by Lord Rothermere and members of the family to which he and his brother, Lord Northcliffe, belonged. In addition to that, the holders of those shares have received in the course of thirteen years three and a half bonus shares, so that where they were paid dividends on one they are now paid on four and a half.

No other group of newspapers can equal that rate of

profit, but the *Daily Express* pays ten per cent., and Allied Newspapers, controlled by the brothers Berry (Lord Camrose and Lord Kemsley), a steady nine. When, therefore, it is asked why newspapers do not publish fewer advertisements, the query is equivalent to inquiring: Why don't they cut their throats?

Another aspect of the Press, on which its eulogists and historiographers touch very lightly, is the measure of its control by advertisers. Lord Northcliffe—who as Alfred Harmsworth made, among many other discoveries, that of the vast wealth to be drawn from newspaper advertising—was alarmed a little while before his death by the dominance of the advertisement side. Since then it has increased.

It is not now considered worth while to publish newspapers on days when the big advertisers withhold their insertions. For some reason they have decided that on Christmas Day and Good Friday nobody will look at their inducements to buy. Probably, being old-fashioned in their outlook, they imagine these days are still observed chiefly as religious festivals. Whatever the origin of their resolve may have been, it caused the newspapers to suspend publication—and the public said: "How generous of the proprietors to give their staffs two extra holidays"!

Out of the competition for advertisements have grown all the other competitions which aim at attracting readers: the insurance and gift schemes, the organization of canvassers who peddle newspapers from door to door, and all the methods devised to make circulations as large as possible. The larger the circulation, the higher the prices that can be charged for advertisements and, in spite of that, the greater the demand for space by manufacturers of certain wares.

Not by those who produce expensive wares; they look at the class of reader rather than the number of copies sold. The big money must be made out of those who supply the needs and whims of the masses, and who can be induced to part with it only by certificates proving that the masses are successfully appealed to by certain newspapers.

Yet it need not be supposed that the newspapers which have the largest circulations make the most money. Their profits depend on how much they devote to bribing purchasers. When the *Daily Mirror* was started in 1903, £100,000 was spent in advertising it before it appeared. Thirty years later sums far larger were allotted to the distribution of gifts as inducements to buy newspapers.

Lord Camrose deplored this "bribery" (that was his word) which had "developed to such an extent that presents of the most extravagant character were being hurled at the poorer classes in the wild race for circulation."

"If a person signs a form, undertaking to buy the paper for twelve or sixteen weeks, he is given a bribe costing as much as ten shillings. The bribes offered include washing-machines, china dinner services, electric irons, women's mackintoshes, men's trousers, overcoats, stockings, women's underwear, and a whole list of articles of a most extraordinary character."

Thousands of readers, Lord Camrose said, took a paper for the period of the gift offer and did not read it.

"Many thousands more take two or three or more papers just to secure the washing-machine or the

pair of trousers, or whatever the particular bribe offered at the moment may be, and do not even look at the papers thus bought.”

Purchasers of this class were of no value to advertisers, Lord Camrose declared ; but he went on to say

“ I doubt whether newspapers of a certain kind are any longer bought for their news value. As an advertiser, I would rather see circulations increased by improvement of the reading matter than by insurances and gifts.”—Lord Austin (motor manufacturer).

that his companies were doing all they could to secure them. They had been obliged in self-defence to adopt the practice he condemned.

Nor did they adopt it half-heartedly. The *Sunday Graphic* came out with a poster :

YOU WANT  
MONEY  
WE GIVE IT

Even before this development of bribery, one Sunday paper with an immense circulation was spending at one time so much on publicity (bringing itself to the notice of the public) that its net revenue was not very large. Now that presents and prizes cost so much in addition to advertising, it may take a newspaper years to become a really paying proposition.

Or it may happen that the line taken by a newspaper in politics, which to-day can hardly be distinguished from economics, makes advertisers disinclined to use it. That has not yet actually been seen. Papers

which advertisers avoid have small circulations. But it is possible to imagine a journal having more readers than any can boast at present and yet being boycotted by the big advertisers on account of its opinions.

Such a journal could just manage to live on its circulation if its readers were satisfied with a smaller bulk of paper than its rivals, stuffed with advertisements, could give them. Often the *Daily Mail* gives for a penny more than a pennyworth of paper, not counting the cost of what is printed upon it. Occasionally others do this, when they are able to publish specially big issues consisting mostly of advertisements. Paying twopence for *The Times*, buyers receive not infrequently as much as twopennyworth of paper, with all the news, articles, and advertisements thrown in.

To a large class of reader newspaper advertisements are more interesting than either news or articles. This class is more likely to take the *Daily Mail* than *The Times*, though *The Times* Personal columns on the front page are as entertaining and instructive as any feature in journalism. But it is not instruction or humour that those who regularly study advertisement pages are in search of: they are mostly women who want to know the fashions or to get "bargains" in clothes.

To exist without large quantities of advertising matter a newspaper would have to win a public which wanted to read, not merely to skim; to be informed, amused, and mentally stimulated. The present trend seems to favour journals in which a small amount of reading matter is included to carry the advertisements.

This predominance of the advertiser is of recent growth. It accounts for the development of the Press



into a vast industry—and for many occurrences, as we shall see in the course of our survey. It has turned newspapers, which half a century ago were privately owned and of no commercial importance, into concerns with huge capitals, with armies of shareholders, and with prominent financiers or industrialists as their controlling chiefs.

"Advertisement revenue made it possible for a man to print a paper at a cost of twopence and sell it at a penny."  
—Hilaire Belloc in *The Free Press*.

Until the end of last century no one thought of a newspaper as the basis of a great fortune. If it could be made to pay its way and to yield a fair income, that was as much as could be hoped. The Walters did not make their money out of selling copies of *The Times*, but out of printing them—a far more profitable activity. Sir Algernon Borthwick, Lord Glenesk, owner of the *Morning Post*, was content to draw a moderate income from it, and to take out his profits not so much in money as in the consideration he received, in the power he could fancy he exercised as proprietor of the organ of High Toryism. The *Daily Telegraph*, which had the largest circulation (250,000) because it was managed with more business-like ability than its competitors, did not make the original Levys very rich men.

Newspapers were then owned mostly by persons who wished to further the advance of a political party. They were political organs. Political leaders were ready to reward their faithful proprietors with baronetcies first and peerages later. Although in the earlier

half of the nineteenth century the *Morning Advertiser* had been started to earn funds for a Licensed Victuallers' orphanage, which it did for a long time, newspapers were not until the end of the nineteenth century discovered to be possible sources of vast fortunes. It was well into the twentieth century before they came to be looked upon as organs of commercial profit, like public-houses or chain grocery stores.

Yet that is not a complete view of the newspaper Press to-day. It is valued by those who control it not alone for the profit it brings them: they see in it a barrier against change, a dam that may keep back the river of time.

Never has there been anything quite like it. Never has so potent a machine been used for influencing, moulding, dominating the thoughts and emotions of the crowd. Never did the owners and editors of newspapers fifty years ago foresee this development; never dreamed it possible for what they styled their profession to be turned into a branch of commerce with immense earning capacity.

There were then differences so deep between newspapers that what one said, or some said, was certain to be denied or contradicted by others. Each had its own opinions and standards. Now, if a mood seems likely to be popular, every popular paper will inflame it, so as not to let its rivals get ahead.

Even those which disagree about politics stand solidly together in stirring up loyal and patriotic sentiments. What their power to make crowds act would amount to, if they tried it out, nobody knows. They can certainly rouse the more superficial feelings and keep them on the stretch for days at a time, when they all devote themselves to it.

This is due to their enormous numbers. How small circulations used to be alongside those of to-day I have shown by mention of the *Daily Telegraph's* much advertised figure, 250,000 copies—printed, not necessarily sold, though in all probability they were nearly all sold, for the system of sending out newspapers on sale or return had not then reached the insane point where it stands now.

No other industry would consent to have from one-tenth to one-seventh of its product thrown back on it as waste. Newsagents then ordered as a rule only as many copies as they knew they could sell to steady customers. A large number of regular subscribers had their papers sent by post. Now many agents habitually order more than they have any likelihood of selling. The whole lot *might* be bought, they argue; and if they are not, they lose nothing.

Check is kept, by circulation managers, on the numbers supplied and returned; but it is generally agreed that cutting returns too fine is bad policy. Large numbers of copies come back, therefore, to be pulped, though not so many as in days before insurance coupons and registered readers kept sales comparatively steady.

If a process could be invented to take out the ink and leave the pulp white, it could be turned into newsprint again. It can be used at present only for rougher purposes.

At the time when the *Daily Telegraph* had "the world's largest circulation," the newspapers of the British Isles did not sell more than two million copies a day all told. Now two of them can prove individual circulations exceeding that figure, another has a million and three-quarters, another a million and a

half. Taken altogether, the number of copies bought every day, morning and evening, cannot be short of fifteen million.

Yet the number of newspapers has diminished. The process known as "rationalization" has been carried on busily. The nine "evenings" which were published in London until about 1920 have been telescoped into three. A dozen years back there were six London "mornings" of the popular sort: there are now four. One of the casualties was the *Westminster Gazette*, whose history illustrates in an instructive way more than one phase of newspaper commerce.

Founded by George Newnes in the interest of the Liberal Party, it was for nearly thirty years an evening journal of distinction; its comment and criticism were valued and discussed. Everyone interested in politics read J. A. Spender's leading articles; no one interested in the theatre missed E. F. Spence on new plays. It also published news. But during all those years, while other evening papers, which contained little but news, displayed in sensational manner, were working through their hundred thousands, the *Westminster* never got up to much more than thirty thousand, and could not at any time exist without a subsidy.

Had Newnes directed the paper himself, he would have given it a popular appeal; it would have had a very different history. He defined his attitude once in these words:

"There is one kind of journalism which directs the affairs of nations; it makes and unmakes Cabinets; it upsets Governments, builds up navies, and does

many other things. It is magnificent. That [he was addressing W. T. Stead] is your journalism. There is another kind which has no such great ambitions. It is content to plod on year after year, giving wholesome and harmless entertainment to crowds of hard-working people, craving for a little fun and amusement. It is quite humble and unpretentious. That is my journalism."

If he had stuck to his own kind, Newnes would not have lost money on the *Westminster*; he would have made another fortune to add to those which *Tit-Bits* and the *Strand Magazine* brought him. When he grew tired of pouring money into the sieve, Lord Cowdray (Samuel Pearson) lent his support. Eventually the paper was changed from an evening to a morning, with an appeal that was meant to be popular. It still lost money, and in time died.

The Cowdrays, father and son, might, as business men of outstanding success and energy, have devoted some of their energy to discovering what was wrong. They let the venture make shipwreck for want of capable business management. That has been the history of many newspapers subsidized by men without journalistic experience or interest.

The nineteenth-century newspapers which prospered in a modest, steady fashion were in the hands of proprietors who knew what they were about: either they managed their properties themselves or they put in capable editors and managers whom they could trust. Journalism has been cursed of late by persons who know nothing whatever about newspapers attempting to manage them.

Two disastrous examples of this extinguished the

*Tribune* and the *Daily Chronicle*. The former was started in 1906 with money left by a Lancashire cotton manufacturer named Thomasson. His son, who was instructed by his father's will to launch a Liberal organ, sought no advice from those most competent to give it. He listened to the incompetent; could hardly have done worse if he had wanted to kill the venture. It expired very soon, having done nothing remarkable save providing Philip Gibbs with the subject for his best novel (*The Street of Adventure*).

The tragedy of the *Daily Chronicle* was more poignant. Here was an old-established organ with a firm hold, as its circulation, after many vicissitudes and much inept handling, of nearly a million a day proved. While Lloyds, the paper-makers, owned it, the management was sound and steady. At one period its page of book reviews was a feature which compelled admiration as well as attention. This was not published in the style of to-day, for the sake of the advertisements it would draw, but because the editor credited his public with a genuine interest in books. No publishers' hacks were allowed to write about them.

This attraction had been dropped, along with other live features of the Robert Donald and Massingham periods, before the paper was sold in 1918 to nominees of Mr. Lloyd George's Liberal Fund, contributed by millionaires. When Mr. Lloyd George thought it had served his purpose long enough, purchasers were found in the persons of two very wealthy British merchants in India. To the position of chairman of the company owning not the *Chronicle* alone, but also a Sunday journal and some papers outside London, they appointed Lord Reading, then just returned from India, where he had been Viceroy.

Lord Reading was so ignorant of the methods of journalism that he naïvely remarked in a speech on the morrow of his appointment that he was "amazed at the capacity of those engaged in daily newspaper production, at the quickness with which a leading article could be turned out, and at the rapidity with which the daily newspapers trod upon the heels of events." If these discoveries "amazed" him, it was clear that he had given no thought to the methods of newspaper production. Unfortunately for the *Chronicle*, he took no pains to acquaint himself with the business of which he was put in charge. On the death of the senior of the two Indian merchants, he rashly sold the *Chronicle* to a speculator in news-print who had taken over a lease of illustrated weeklies from Sir John Ellerman, the shipping millionaire, and made himself an object of ridicule by bringing out a new one which was almost the greatest failure ever known.

The new controller, instead of improving the paper gradually, did nothing for a time, then planned sensational developments on borrowed money. What was in effect a new paper, and a very good one, was produced in March 1930. Anyone with an elementary knowledge of newspapers could see that it needed time to win the popularity it deserved. But the bankers who had lent the money for it knew even less about the newspaper trade than the man who borrowed it. They declined to go on lending. In a feverish hurry a purchaser for the property was sought. On a Friday evening in June, after three months' working of the new paper, the staff left with a firm assurance that rumours of stoppage were untrue. On the Sunday, when they arrived at the office, they were told that the *Chronicle* would appear no more: it had been amalgamated with the *Daily News*.

This lamentable episode, which threw some fourteen hundred persons out of work and permanently reduced the field of newspaper employment, exposed the disastrous effect of the growth of Press advertising. But for that, and the illusory prospect of enormous profits, newspaper-ownership would not interest millionaires, speculators, men to whom it represents merely a business proposition, not differing from others in which they are accustomed to engage.

"Newspapers exist as a commercial proposition."—The Marquis of Reading, when chairman of United Newspapers.

Their incursion has entirely changed the atmosphere of Fleet Street (which, by the way, though still used to denote the Press, is the home of only two out of the eleven London daily papers); and it has had another result scarcely less unfortunate than making large dividends the sole standard of success, causing unrest and inquietude throughout editorial staffs, substituting sensationalism for sanity both in contents and in methods of seeking readers.

That result is the use of newspapers by certain of their controllers for the proclamation of fantastic policies and foolish views. I write "controllers" and not "proprietors," because newspaper finance is designed to put into the hands of men who do not own newspapers the complete power to run them as they please. They secure this power through their ownership of deferred shares, which alone carry full voting power—that is to say, they are the only shareholders entitled to vote at meetings unless dividends or interest have been for some time unpaid.



The holders of deferred shares are also, as a rule, the only unlimited participators in profits. Preference shares carry a fixed rate of dividend, and these are usually the only ones which members of the general public can hold. The very large profits of the *Daily Mail* go to a few people, whether distributed in dividends or bonus shares, and these few people have the right to control the management of the enterprise.

In other businesses this would not so much matter. Indeed, it might be the most efficient mode of carrying them on. In one which produces a commodity capable of exercising a potent influence on the public mind, capable of affecting the course of history, the unchecked power of irresponsible men with ill-considered schemes and almost crazy notions is a limitless evil. Or, to speak it more precisely, that evil would be limitless if the schemes were not so frequently changed, the notions so soon discarded.

Lord Beaverbrook might have won a following for his Empire Free Trade, although it means Protection and although the Empire will have nothing to do with it, if he had kept steadily to it, rejecting all other slogans. When he mixed up with this the isolation of Britain (so plainly impossible), departure from the League of Nations, abandonment of all effort to restore prosperity by co-operation, and other Canadian-small-town nostrums, all chance of his making an impression faded. And when he allowed Low to caricature him in his own evening paper as a small, grinning ape or pigmy, the public kept that vision of him in their imaginations and declined to regard him as anything but a comic figure.

He helped to confirm this view of himself by such remarks as :

"I am no authority on foreign politics. I cannot

speaking their languages. I don't want to. I don't know their politicians. I don't like them. I don't want alliance with European States."

Lord Rothermere (Harold Harmsworth), champion of every losing cause, prophet of almost every event which has not occurred during the past fourteen years that he has been in control of the *Daily Mail* and its satellites, appears to the nation rather as a sinister than as an amusing phenomenon.

It is true that his daily shout of "Hats off to France" at the time when French policy was ruining hopes of reconstruction and making some form of Hitlerism certain; his screams for the Hohenzollerns to be taken back; his backing up of Fascists in Italy and Nazis in Germany; his frantic affection for Hungary followed by cruel neglect; his taking-up and dropping of Mosley as his inclinations or *Daily Mail* advertisers swayed him—these and other vagaries have passed in such quick succession as to make almost no impact on the national mind, though they may have disturbed and confused it.

Yet the possibility exists that one of the business men in command of newspaper battalions may at any time advocate, as good for business, some course which might be opposed to public interest and yet, for the moment, popular. This would be more likely to happen in a group of newspapers under the direction of men who remain in the background than in journals whose controllers keep themselves in full view.

It is not improbable that the *Daily Telegraph* may be offering a more effective hindrance to progress than either the *Mail* or the *Express*. The Berry family, with Lord Camrose at its head, is composed of men clever enough to understand that giving instructions to competent journalists, who carry them out in a quiet,

unsensational way, is far better than cavorting in print themselves with spotlights trained on them. The *Telegraph* manages to clothe reaction in what passes for frank common sense, and can lend an air of reasonableness to arguments which appear starkly absurd in the *Morning Post*, which is watched over by Sir Percy Bates of the Cunard-White Star Company.

The proprietors of the *Manchester Guardian* wittily hit off the change that has come over the newspaper situation since advertising revenue became its most prominent feature by issuing a poster which proclaimed their organ to be "The Paper without a Peer." I have shown that the practice of handing out "honours" to newspaper owners is not new. But the men so "honoured" used to be journalists, who were proud of their profession. The titled controllers of to-day consider it a business, as Kennedy Jones, Northcliffe's partner and joint-creator of the *Daily Mail*, once declared he did.

It was not true of him. So long at any rate as he remained in journalism, he was a journalist. But it is true generally of the men controlling newspapers, and for a long time it has been said in the City of London that more than one of them use the paper or papers under their control for the purpose of carrying on financial operations.

Many years ago a financial editor of *The Times* was convicted of this form of fraud; it is not difficult to work. So far no definite charge has been framed; therefore it would be unfair to name those against whom the undefined accusations are made. But there are financial editors, active and retired, who could help to clear this cloudy business up, and, as those who discuss it in the City include men of high standing, it may possibly be brought to the notice of the law.

Everyone who cares for the good name of the Press would be glad to see it cleared of grimy imputations. Whether they contain any truth or not, it is evident that the present-day newspaper controllers' principal anxiety is to show a good profit and to be able to announce at their annual meetings that they can pay good dividends.

For this they cannot be blamed, and here we come to an unfortunate consequence of thousands of people sharing in newspaper ownership. Even if the controllers were progressive, eager to see necessary changes made in the structure of society, conscious of their responsibility, they could not act freely, as individual proprietors did, when faced with dilemmas which have profit on one side and professional honour on the other.

"When the newspaper owner was compelled to respect his advertisers as his paymasters, his power of giving true news and printing sound opinion was limited, even though his own inclinations should lean towards such news and such opinions."—Hilaire Belloc in *The Free Press*.

To shareholders, ignorant of the nature of their property, the standards of honourable journalism mean nothing: they care only for their dividends, and, as they have probably bought their shares at a price much higher than their face value, dividends must be high.

The honest controller might be faced by such a situation as this:

The one-pound shares of his company have been quoted as high as £7. This was the result of very high dividends being paid over a fairly long period. The profits have declined and are still declining.

If the dividend is lowered substantially, those who have bought at a premium will feel aggrieved and make trouble. By almost any means the circulation must be increased (or at all events saved from further decline) and the advertising rates kept up.

The commercialized newspaper has thus gone the same road as the commercialized theatre and cinema.

With far more ability at its service, with infinitely improved technical resources, and with a public more ready to welcome enterprise and personality in newspapers, the Press has less character, it shows less initiative, it is a weaker element in public life. The reason for this is clear to all who have seen the change happen.

Since the Advertising Department became the most important, it has been in a position to influence the general nature of the reading matter. It asks for news and comment that shall be soothing, reassuring, innocuous. The frame of mind the advertiser wishes to create is that of a man who feels that he can say to his wife: "Why don't you buy yourself some new clothes?" or: "Let's have a new carpet for the dining-room, or a new car." The first reaction of such a man to disturbing statements, or the suggestion that changes must come, is that he stops spending money.

The atmosphere in which Advertising Departments would like to envelop newspaper readers is one of warm, comforting security. Those who have money to spend, and are inclined to spend it on articles advertised in newspapers are usually anxious to keep things as they are. Advertisers are therefore impatient of any idea that things cannot be kept as they are.

Even a quarter of a century ago, while the likelihood

of war grew apace, the Press in general preferred to feature pleasant, mildly exciting events, sport and games especially, and to say as little as might be about the gathering peril. So the war caught the nation unawares.

Later the inclination to stress "Society's" doings and the pleasure-seeking side of life chimed with the effort to prevent any change being made in its routine. It was felt, perhaps unconsciously, that the one hope of holding the social edifice together was not to allow any part of it to be altered.

In one of her letters from Mesopotamia Gertrude Bell said:

"Ascot and balls and parties are what I read of in *The Times*—or rather I see they are there, and extraordinarily little about things that really matter."

That was precisely the effect which the Advertising Departments desired. (The letter was, however, a little unfair to *The Times*.)

It is not suggested that advertising managers, or directors, as they often are, lay down the lines on which papers are to be edited. Nothing so crude as that occurs. But a word to the controller as to the desirability of this or the unwisdom of that course, is certain to be listened to: for these are matters that may affect profits. The word is then passed on to the editor as if it came from the controller himself. No doubt the editor knows its origin, but he will be prudent enough to act, and not to comment, upon the instruction.

All improvements have their disadvantages. No one would care to return to the days of stage-coach and sedan chair, yet everyone deploras the many thousands killed and wounded each year by motor vehicles. Admitting the immense pleasure that Radio music affords, one

may regret the playing of instruments, the blending of voices that went on in the homes of the past.

The newspaper of this age is in most ways an improvement on that of fifty years ago. But, while it has gained in width of interest, in variety, in appearance, in vigour, and in flexibility of language, it has lost—or, more correctly, the popular part of it has lost—the independence, the sense of responsibility, the conviction that it had a part to play in the national life, which once earned for it the title, not given altogether in jest, of the Fourth Estate of the Realm.

What did this description mean?

The "three Estates of the Realm" known to the constitution are the Lords Spiritual (archbishops and bishops with seats in the House of Lords), the Lords Temporal (peers), and the Commons. Upon them is laid the responsibility for governing the nation. Calling the Press the Fourth Estate meant that it had a share in this task.

By its daily information as to events bearing on the public welfare, by its comment and counsel, its premonitions and warnings, it took part in directing the course of national affairs. In the diaries and memoirs of mid-nineteenth-century notables this aspect of the Press is recognized as an element in the life of the nation.

Not always as a desirable element, however. Clarendon, when he was Foreign Secretary, spoke of the Press being "more potent for evil than for good." But, in spite of Carlyle's bludgeon of abuse and Matthew Arnold's satirical pin-pricks, newspapers of the first rank had a reputation for sobriety of judgment and a wider range of knowledge than most statesmen. How could a Government like that of Britain, it was asked, be carried on without them?

The diarists, autobiographers, and memoir-writers of this present period will leave a very different picture for posterity's enlightenment. Their books refer to the Press in tones of regret or derision. Of the popular newspapers, those which circulate all over the country and are sold by the million, they are frankly contemptuous. Of certain others they speak with a lingering respect, but do not credit the Press, as a whole, with influence on political events or social changes.

No more than a slight acquaintance with newspaper production is needed to explain this. In the offices of forty years ago the editor was supreme. He stood for the paper. Editorial policy was all-important. The editorial department was the only one that existed in the popular imagination.



## CHAPTER II

### THE DAILY ROUND IN A NEWSPAPER OFFICE

WHICH department is the most powerful in almost every newspaper office at present? The Advertisement Department. It is not only powerful, it is indispensable. It provides the life-blood of the paper.

Upon it hangs the responsibility for prosperity or failure. The throbbing of its pulses is felt throughout the building. When the flow of "ads" slackens, economy crises are liable to darken the sky. When it is in full tide, bouquets are handed out, increases of pay can be suggested. Every aspect of the newspaper is affected by the activities of the advertisement chiefs.

Upon the result of their efforts to sell space depends, for example, the size of the paper. This varies; sometimes it is sixteen pages, sometimes twenty, occasionally more than twenty. News has nothing to do with these variations. They are governed by the advertisements.

Once, in the days when newspapers were bought for their opinions and advertising was in its infancy, the amount of news, or of matter that passed for news, might make a paper larger or smaller. *The Times* had then an Outer and an Inner Sheet, two separate parts. Many thought this division was made so that a wife might take the front page, with the Births, Marriages, and Deaths, while her husband frowned over the leading articles or studied the political speeches. In truth, the Outer Sheet was the receptacle of news held over from

the day before, of articles that had long waited for their chance to appear, of dull letters from bigwigs whom it was not worth while to offend. Upon the volume of these "held-overs" depended the number of pages. Advertisements were few and inconspicuous. No "display" lightened the pages of solid type. If it had been suggested to the editor that advertising was more than a subsidiary to the real business of the paper, which was to form opinion, he would have stared in amazement, then waved the notion aside.

In those days some event of rare public interest might induce newspapers to enlarge their usual size. The extra pages would be filled with news. Now, as soon as the date of any occurrence likely to attract attention is announced, advertising departments begin to solicit orders for space in the issues of that date and the dates just before it. Advertisers also begin without solicitation to book space in a few journals which they consider specially useful.

Events in which royalty is concerned are very closely bound up with advertising; when newspapers publish Coronation or Royal Funeral numbers, these are chiefly filled with advertisements. The same is true of the supplements published by *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* about industries or countries. None of these special issues would be published if there were no buyers of space ready to pay high rates. It is the advertising alone which makes it possible to give newspapers away.

That sounds absurd, yet it is exactly what happens. Even copies of ordinary issues often contain, as we have seen, slightly more printed paper than the penny or the twopence paid for them would buy. The printed paper in special numbers sold at the usual price costs a good deal more than the price charged to the newspaper

buyer. Add all the other expenses—advertisement staff, distribution, editorial, rent, rates, and taxes—to the cost of the paper, the ink, the composing of type, the foundry, the press-room, and it becomes clear that when you buy a newspaper, you often get more value than you pay for. In other words, you get something for nothing. A large part of the newspaper is given away.

“The modern newspaper is in a financial sense provided for the public by the advertiser. The reader really pays for his daily paper in a sum added to the cost of his or her dry goods, tobacco, tea, whisky and patent medicines.”—Sir Norman Angell.

If it depended on circulation for its profits, the Press would not be the all-pervading, powerful element in our lives that it has been for a generation past. Newspapers would be very much smaller; they would be far less enterprising, because they would be forced to keep editorial expenses down.

At present the cost of the editorial department is so small an item that it might be doubled, even trebled, or might be wiped out altogether without making any difference to the accounts at the end of the year. Money can be spent freely, even recklessly, on the securing of sensational features—the life-story of a murderer written by his wife, the amorous adventures of a notorious film or stage star, an article on World Peace by Mr. Wells, the memoirs of a jockey or football player. No expense is grudged in such directions, for the reason that these are baits to catch readers; and the more readers there are the higher the price that can be demanded for advertisements.

Newspapers without advertisements, or with a few only, would have small circulations compared with those of the moment. They could not afford to push their sales by spending very large sums first on persuading people to become readers, and then on holding them.

Very little reliance is placed by the circulation pushers on the quality of the editorial pages and news. They believe more in publicity of the kind that dings the name of the paper into the public ear, or invents a slogan such as "Be in the know," or associates a paper with the picture of a woman with a grotesque nose reading it over the shoulder of a fellow-passenger in a Tube train. The circulation pushers look on insurance schemes as their most certain pull on a large section of the public. (It is admitted that one-third of the big circulations would drop off if these schemes were to be scrapped.) They send men to distribute money to persons seen with newspapers under their arms. They organize sand-castle competitions for children at the seaside, beauty shows, flower-growing contests. They give away large amounts of money in prizes for solving puzzles.

All that expenditure is justified if it keeps up circulation and thus fills a paper with advertisements at high prices. If the getting of advertisements were not the chief concern of the popular Press, there would be no circulation pushers, no bribery of buyers, no need for all the ingenious activities which have sent sales up to figures undreamed of forty years ago. These activities rank in importance next to those of the Advertisement Department in the office of any newspaper that takes *Business is business* for its motto. For if advertisements are essential to the existence of newspapers as we know them, large circulation figures are essential for the securing of advertisers.

Therefore, quite reasonably, advertisement and circulation have become the most important branches of newspaper work.

Until the early years of this century the advertisement offices of newspapers were so far subordinate to the editorial departments that the latter scarcely deigned to notice their existence. They did not, indeed, do anything to make it known. The clerks sat and waited for advertisements to be brought in, just as the sub-editors sat and waited for news. Neither made efforts to get any.

As for the publisher, he was a figure-head, liable to proceedings in the Courts if his paper transgressed, but no more concerned to increase the number of copies sold than was the editor or, it might be said in most cases, than the manager himself.

Now the circulation manager is a most important person. He has a big permanent staff. He is always on the hunt for ideas. When canvassing schemes are afoot, he organizes armies of men and women who make house-to-house visitations, show the paper, and dilate on the advantages of becoming a registered reader.

Do not suppose that their "patter" relates to the reading matter. This does not, as a rule, figure in their instructions. They are paid to point out the benefits of the insurance offered to registered readers, though, as these are now identical for the largest circulations, they have the greatest success with those who know least about the newspaper business. Fortunately for them, such ignorance is the badge of nearly all the householders they visit. Nothing amuses circulation departments more than the readiness of mankind—and more especially perhaps womankind, to whom they so largely address their blandishments—to be caught in their skilfully designed lures.

There they sit, then, the pushers whose task it is to enable the advertisement director to supply clients with satisfactory net sale certificates. Without these guarantees of its being read in a vast number of households no daily newspaper could hope to get advertising. They were the invention of Lord Northcliffe at the period when the *Mail* was far ahead of its rivals, and could afford better than any of them to give the advertiser exact figures, so that he might know what he was paying for. Up to that time "circulation" was a vague term, meaning usually the number of copies printed, which was often far greater than the number sold. The new method was opposed, but has now for many years been insisted upon by advertisers.

There is, however, something else they want to know—something that is not so easily learned as the net sale. This is the nature of the circulation. Is a paper bought mainly by the well-to-do, or by people who have little to spend outside the narrow range of necessities? Does it interest women, who are the principal buyers of advertised goods, as much as it interests men? If there is too much sport, advertisers are frightened off; they say the keen followers of racing, football, or cricket are of no use to them. Better err on the other side of overweighting the Woman's Section and the news likely to appeal to women than go in excessively for sport—at any rate, in papers that are bought by the mass.

This, then, is one of the problems pored over by the men who occupy the advertisement offices—how to persuade the agents who, for the most part, place the orders of the largest advertisers that they have a really "good" circulation to offer. The advertisers, of course, do their best to find out for themselves whether it is "good" enough. They "key" their insertions—that

is to say, they lay traps to find out whether their advertisements have been seen by persons who write to them or to retailers direct. If you see "Apply to So and so, Dept. F," you may know that in other papers the letter of the alphabet will be different. That is the simple plan; others are more complicated. None of them is of much use.

In a general way the purchasing power of newspaper readers can be roughly estimated. Nobody would advertise the more expensive makes of motor-car in the popular Press. Neither cheap household soap nor low-priced teas need be looked for in *The Times*. Big circulations are used chiefly by manufacturers of cigarettes and cleansers, by the women's dress shops, by firms that offer bargains of all sorts, by companies that build cheap houses, by companies making "toilet preparations" which publish puffs of them by titled women, accompanied by their portraits. To smear on their cheeks the same stuff that is used by the Duchess of Leinster, Lady Milbanke, Lady Mary St. Clair Erskine, and Lady Diana Wellesley, "great-great grand-niece of the famous Duke of Wellington," gives factory girls, it seems, a peculiar thrill.

Common enough in the stress of fierce newspaper competition becomes the practice of running among the news little pieces about advertisers' goods. One of the advertisement chief's difficult passages is between the demands for this sort of concealed and therefore specially valuable publicity, and the repugnance of the News Editor to admit it. Frequently the condition that editorial notice shall appear accompanies orders for space. Not so frequently advertisements disguised as news are accepted at a high rate.

There are agencies which deal in "editorial publicity."

They are employed and highly paid by proprietors who want to see their goods or their enterprises mentioned as matters of public interest. They send to newspapers "stories" skilfully written up to catch attention with the publicity hidden in them. People in the limelight are paid to address letters to editors containing references of the same nature. There is a prejudice against such methods, not only on the editorial side, but among advertising agents, who naturally do not like losing commission and want all business done through them.

In London the advertisement manager does business mainly with agents. In smaller places he must be on friendly terms with all the big traders, whether wholesale or retail, in the district. He must see that his paper gets its share of all advertising that is given out.

"The big draper is the biggest customer of the Press."—  
Lord Beaverbrook in *Politicians and the Press*.

Both London and provincial papers are obliged to keep up a campaign of publicity for themselves, using all manner of means to recommend their organs to advertisers. No paper can now afford to wait for advertisements to come in: they must be diligently sought for. Clever representatives able to hand out a persuasive line of talk must be engaged. Agents must be courted and impressed. All the energy available must be directed to selling as much "white space" as possible.

No more do Press controllers of newspapers complain, as Lord Northcliffe did in his final years, that "advertisements were spoiling the paper." They are more inclined to take the same view as Mrs. Whitelaw Reid, owner of an American journal, who, noticing that the



Saturday issues contained far less advertising than appeared on other days, suggested that it would be wiser not to publish on Saturday at all.

No objection to this would be raised by the editorial department. A five-day week (which Northcliffe urged as desirable, and even instituted) would be enough for men engaged in a task so hurried and so absorbent of energy as bringing out a newspaper. They are on the stretch the whole time. In most other businesses minutes lost can be retrieved; what cannot comfortably be done to-day can be put off till to-morrow. The newspaper must be completed by a certain hour; it must contain everything that is considered necessary in the way of news. Features will sometimes keep, though usually they are topical. News is dead if kept. By "the end of the night" everything must be cleared up. Nothing can be laid aside either for reflection or for more leisurely treatment.

Nor can any member of the staff of a newspaper, save those in quite subordinate positions, ever feel that his work is done. After he has got home, his hours of duty over, he may at any moment be rung up and asked what happened about this or how that should be handled. Even when he goes on holiday, if he holds a responsible job, he is liable to be worried by what is occurring at the office. Delane, the famous editor of *The Times*, staying with a duke in the Highlands, remarked at breakfast one morning, after glancing at the paper, that he would willingly have crawled to London on his hands and knees to prevent the appearance of an article he had just seen.

First of the daily newspaper editorial chiefs to appear in the morning is the News Editor. He will have been

preceded by his assistant, who goes carefully through the other papers and cuts any item that looks as if it were worth following up; he notes also any pieces of news that have been missed. The News Editor himself probably looks at the rival sheets on his way to the office or as soon as he gets there. By the time he sits down at his desk he may have sketched out in his mind what are likely to be the prominent "splashes" and "tops" for next day's issue, though it is quite probable news may "break" before evening which will alter all his plans.

A "splash" is a double- or triple-column heading, with a large-type introduction. On the front page there are often two of these. "Tops" are news-stories that appear at the tops of columns. "Story" as a term applied, not to fiction, but to news, came to Britain from America; it is heard constantly in newspaper offices.

"I thought that a good story."

"Is there a story in it?"

"What sort of a story can you make of that?"

Thus the News Editor to:

a reporter who has done well on his yesterday's assignment;

a reporter who has suggested a possible line of inquiry;

a reporter to whom a cutting has been handed.

To the News Editor everything that happens in the world is judged by the test question: "What sort of a story will it make?" His life is spent in hunting big stories. Sometimes they drop from heaven. On a Sunday when news was more than usually scarce came the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo. Though no one at the moment saw the

importance this would have in history, as the match that set light to explosives scattered throughout Europe and started the Great War, it was hailed by News Editors as a god-send.

On another Sunday night—or early Monday morning—there was sent round by the British United Press, a news agency, announcement of the destruction of the airship *R. 101* with the British Air Minister (Lord Thomson) on board. It is one of the curiosities of journalism that this reached the B.U.P. from Buenos Aires. When news of the disaster near Beauvais got to Paris, it was immediately sent to South America, whence it was flashed back to London.

The B.U.P. had another piece of luck that morning. Trying to put a telephone call through to Beauvais, they got mixed up with a call that an aircraftsman who had escaped the wreck was making to the Air Ministry. He told the full story before he knew he was talking to a newspaper man. However, he was assured that his particulars should be given to the officials, and they were. But they were also sent out as the first detailed account of the catastrophe.

No matter how prudent and enterprising the News Editor may be in searching for hints of news and putting reporters on to them, much falls into his lap unexpectedly.

Reporters have begun to come in soon after the News Editor took his seat. Some are sent out on engagements noted in the Diary—these are probably not worth much. The men with the keenest noses for news and the most patient tenacity in tracking down facts or people are reserved for more difficult jobs. They may be told to find out what action the police mean to take in a murder case where a strong suspicion points to the probable

perpetrator; to collect opinion from well-known men and women on some question of the day; to investigate accusations against shipowners of sending vessels to sea in an unsafe condition; to go round markets and learn why vegetables are so dear; or to get the views of scientists on some new theory in physics or astronomy.

A reporter used to be equipped for his job when he had learned shorthand and could take down speeches at the rate of a hundred and fifty words a minute. That was the bulk of his occupation. It is now long since shorthand became, not only unnecessary, but a positive handicap; when those who put it forward as a qualification were ranked as "shorthand writers," and employed accordingly. Now it is recognized as being occasionally useful, but by no means indispensable. Indeed, few reporters know much about it. Their abilities must be of a nature far removed from the mechanical.

"Personal journalism is an infamous abyss in which a sadly large section of the Press wallows."—Lord Chief Justice Hewart.

They must also be thick-skinned. Not because they are treated as social inferiors, which was their invariable treatment in the days of the Old Journalism. Proprietors and editors set the example. Northcliffe altered that, along with much else. Thanks to him, both the status and the pay of reporters were improved even before the National Union of Journalists began its good work. To-day the reporter may be feared and therefore disliked, but he is not told to go to the back door, insulted by butlers, looked at as if he might steal the spoons.

No; his thick skin is required as a protection against his own self-contempt. He may be asked at any moment

to behave in a way that every decent instinct in his nature revolts against. The disgusting habit of prying into private affairs and pestering people related to suicides or murderers was not, as many say carelessly, introduced by the *Daily Mail*. That paper for a long period discouraged anything of the kind. Only during the past fifteen or twenty years has competition for readers grown so frenzied as to prompt demands upon reporters that, as a body, they detest and resent.

Nobody in any position of authority in the office of a popular daily newspaper believes that readers can be attracted by appeals to their intelligence. Important, interesting news skilfully presented; good writing by men and women in touch with life at many points; criticism which takes for granted an eagerness to know the best that is being thought and imagined—these may, it is admitted, have their value as window-dressing—that is to say, they may help to persuade advertisers that a newspaper goes among people of education and culture. (The advertisers—poor fish!—delude themselves into supposing that such people are affected by advertisements.) But any suggestion that features of the kind mentioned can swell the number of purchasers would be received with a shrug of impatience. That competition reduces even the best-intentioned to the level, or below the level of the frankly cynical, is shown by the methods of the *News-Chronicle*.

The Cadbury family, which chiefly owns this paper, and Sir Walter Layton, who is its controller, are known to be desirous of aiming at a high ideal. Yet they adopt the view that, in search of circulation, they must do as their rivals do—and then some! For example, their contents bills urge people to buy the paper for racing tips, for advice from a "beauty specialist," for knitting

competitions, for the remarks of a billiard player on billiards and of a military officer on bridge.

The consequence of this is that the paper is no longer regarded as a serious commentator on public affairs. Its political weight has dwindled to nothing. Mr. Scott James, who was for many years on the staff of the *Chronicle*, says truly in his book, *The Influence of the Press*, that

“ the diversion of brains and talent to entertainment must be at the expense of a newspaper’s pretensions to be the guides and philosophers of its readers in serious affairs.”

What the Cadbury family and Sir Walter Layton might urge in reply to this is that, while they desire earnestly to lead opinion and to turn the public mind to serious affairs, they cannot keep the paper going without a circulation, which, in their judgment, can be secured only by copying the others. They might point to the extinction of the *Chronicle* with nearly a million buyers daily, though that was due to reckless finance, not to paucity of readers. Everyone in the newspaper business would, however, agree with them that the “ popular ” journal must be popular or die. Disagreement begins over the assumption that all must aim at popularity with the same class and adopt identical methods of obtaining it.

These methods are pushed even further by the *News-Chronicle* than by its rivals, for the reason that it does not feel easy or certain about them ; it therefore exaggerates them for fear of not going far enough. On the day I write this the main news-stories in the *Mail* and *Herald* are on the dropping of Sanctions against Italy, while even the picture papers, *Sketch* and *Mirror*, splash on disturbing events in Belgium and Palestine.

The *News-Chronicle* presents as the most important news of the day :

## ENGLISH GIRL'S TENNIS TRIUMPH HERALDS GREAT CARNIVAL OF SPORT.

Now, it is inconceivable that Sir Walter Layton or the Cadburys can think of sport as anything more than agreeable distraction; it is improbable that any single member of the paper's editorial staff would argue that this was the best news. What they all argue is that the public wants it and must be humoured for the sake of increased circulation.

More readers, more and more—that is the aim of all the popular papers. They do not offer themselves to a public; they want *the* public, all of it, or as much of it as they can beguile. That is why the *Daily Herald* "plays up" royalty; why the *Daily Express*, entirely soul-less, runs articles on "Why I Believe in God"; why the *News-Chronicle* makes a feature of its betting tips; why the *Daily Mail* tries to be everything to everybody, losing all the while.

Newspapers of the popular sort are without personality. You cannot feel there is an intelligence or an imagination behind them, nor even a ceaseless powerful energy, as there was behind Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*. They have no flavour, they stir no enthusiasm.

Once the *Daily News* had a devoted following of earnest pious people; the *Daily Chronicle* was a favourite with a large section of the intelligentsia. Now the *News-Chronicle* appeals to the betting publican and the silly woman greedy for "beauty hints" as eagerly as to people interested in things of the mind. Thus, the one popular national daily which belongs to people concerned about other things than profit goes even further than the

rest in playing down to the supposed popular preference for frivolity against things that matter.

What would News Editors say to my claim that this is a supposition and not a fact? Most of them would remark that, if ever I knew anything about journalism, I must have forgotten it completely. One or two would wearily agree. There is no means of deciding which is right. The man who can tell you what the public wants in newspapers does not exist.

We know how it can be induced to buy them. Let the name of a paper meet the eye constantly, offer tempting insurances, hold out the hope of winning big money prizes, give something away—so purchasers can be lured. But what they read with pleasure, and what they pass over—these are secrets.

There are two ways in which you can produce a paper. One is to fill it with what interests you. The other way, which the producers of popular journals follow, is to convince yourself that the other fellows know better than you do and imitate them. Whatever one does will

“ When the Press set out to capture majorities, to force itself upon the largest number in the crowd, it persuaded itself that the largest number was the most ignorant, the stupidest, the most vulgar.”—R. A. Scott-James, Editor of *London Mercury* and formerly leader-writer on *Daily Chronicle*, in *The Influence of the Press*.

be duplicated, triplicated maybe, possibly quadrupled. The capture of a number of persons addicted to betting by the first paper to publish “starting prices”—that is, the odds against the winning horses—soon led to this information being given by the others. As soon as it



occurred to one to print with the financial article pictures of chairmen or managing directors of companies, these grim, hard-mouthed visages lowered from nearly all. Directly one began to give away books (they still call it that, though actually a profit is now made by it) the rival organizations rushed to do likewise. If an idea is put up to them, they look round to see if there is anything of the sort being done: if not, they turn the idea down.

No sense of shame, no self-respect hinders them from copying with barefaced servility. When the *Evening News* made a hit with war stories from actual experience, the *Star* started a feature on the same lines. When the *Sunday Express* engaged Lord Castlerosse to write a column of "flapdoodle," odds and ends of the peerage popped up in other quarters almost overnight.

Consequently, when the pestering of persons unhappily related to victims of "tragedies" was begun by one "national," the rest, as usual, took it up, under the impression—quite wrong, I believe—that, if they did not, people would drop them and transfer their custom in order to read this pestilent stuff somewhere else. This was, then, the kind of thing that reporters were sent out to do:

A young woman died suddenly in painful circumstances. An inquest had to be arranged. The widowed mother and younger sister of the dead girl were summoned from Scotland to attend the inquest. Soon after their arrival they went to the house where the death had occurred to learn what they could. They were met on the doorstep by a small crowd of reporters pressing impatiently for news. As they came out they had again to run the gauntlet of the reporters, and when getting into their taxi they unfortunately gave the address of their hotel in a voice loud enough to be overheard.

The disgraceful story is continued by a friend :

“ The reporters set out at once in hot pursuit, and on arriving at the hotel the ladies were again confronted by them. The reporters followed them into the hotel, renewing their demands for news. I called at the hotel in the evening and found some four or five of the reporters still prowling up and down the corridor. Seeing that I was a friend of the ladies, one of them came up to me ; I gave him a strong bit of my mind. I advised the ladies to go up to their rooms and stay there, as I thought that there at least they would be safe. But not a bit of it. The bedside telephone soon started to ring. ‘ This is the ——— wishing to speak to Mrs. ———.’ Then a photograph of the dead woman was pushed under the bedroom door with a paper requesting to know if it were a correct likeness. One of the reporters actually applied for a bedroom close by for himself so as to be able to pounce upon the ladies the moment they appeared in the morning.”

Another bad case was that of a woman reporter sent by the *Express* to interview the Duchess of Marlborough after her husband's death. The widow had done her best to avoid publicity. She tried to keep her address secret, even passed under another name. The journalist tracked her and asked for the interview. She was told the Duchess did not wish to say anything. She refused to go away, and a jug of water was thrown over her. Her account of the disgraceful scene was published as a scoop by the *Express*.

Mr. Beverley Nichols has described his feelings of misery and degradation on being sent by the *Daily Mail* (this was after Northcliffe's death) to tear from the

father and mother of a woman sentenced to death some scraps of reminiscence, some broken words of sorrow, that might be gloated over by sadistic ghouls. Luckily for him he had talents which procured him a livelihood by other means. Hard is the lot of the reporter who is compelled to take part in scenes such as those described.

Some have appealed to their Union to draw up a code of professional ethics. Something has been done in this direction. But until the Union is strong enough to withdraw all its men from any office where such a depraved view of journalism is taken, proprietors cannot be compelled to decency. No other mode of constraining them seems possible.

Sellers of filthy meat are punished. Stinking fish cannot be offered to purchasers without risk of imprisonment. Any druggist who sold poison to all and sundry on demand would find the law on his tracks and be disabled from further practice by his professional body. Yet the men who own the controlling power in newspapers can commit offences far more harmful, and sit in the House of Lords and be made the objects of slavish adulation and be praised by weathercock politicians for their "public spirit," while wretched reporters employed to do their dirty work are unjustly subject to general execration.

Happily, these dark hours in their lives do not recur very often. At other times their work is full of varied interest. A reporter should know something about everything, and he will be wise if he knows everything about something. For that gives him the standing of an expert, and he may find, if he has chosen his pet subject cleverly, that he can in time devote himself to it and escape from the miscellaneous reporting which is so

exhausting to body and mind that it tends more and more to become an occupation for the very young.

There is satisfaction to be got out of it if the work includes descriptive writing and if the copy handed in is printed pretty much as it stands. But the practice in many offices is to use reporters simply as news-hounds, as gatherers of raw material, which is worked up—that is to say, put into shape—by a sub-editor or a special “write-up man.”

Thus a reporter may spend all day in assembling the material for a story. He is at some distance from the office, so he telephones what seems to him to be an account of the matter which is fit to be published as it stands. Next morning he sees a “re-write” which contains not one single phrase of his. If he has any of

“Perhaps in heaven there may be a paper published with some degree of fraternity between the sub-editors and the reporters. But on earth never. . . . A deep abysmal pit separates these two workers whose harmonious partnership one would imagine to be vital to the health and prosperity of the newspaper.”—From *On Going to Press*, by an experienced newspaper man, Mr. F. L. Stevens.

the instincts of an artist, which the good reporter must have, he is disappointed, disheartened. After several experiences of this kind, he will simply telephone the bare facts, making no attempt to write the story himself.

News editors struggle against this, knowing that it takes the spirit out of their most promising reporters. But they are mostly powerless to prevent it. The Sub-editing Department has for a number of years been growing stronger at the expense of the reporting staff.

Always an antagonism has smouldered between them.

The explanation of this is that whatever the reporters write must pass through the hands of the sub-editors. Their work is cut, sliced, and slaughtered until the news is trimmed to fit the space available or is, at least, plain to the point.

It may be the sub-editor cannot help himself. Told to reduce a column to a few paragraphs, or worse still a few lines, he is compelled to slash and mangle. But every reporter believes that he does it because he enjoys spoiling someone else's effort. And in return the sub-editor regards reporters as a careless, ungrammatical, unreasonable crew, who never understand what the paper wants, who are continually trying to introduce purple passages or to treat the commonplace in an original way, and who are constitutionally unable to state a fact plainly or to make a correct quotation.

The Newspaper Revolution has tilted the balance in the sub-editor's favour. This could not be avoided. The attention paid to the appearance of newspaper pages adds to the importance of the work done by sub-editors. They are, as it were, the stomach of the organization. They receive all the food that has been gathered by the News Department, and they digest it.

Their task includes throwing up the point of a story that seems most likely to catch the eye and win a smile or a shudder; cutting it down to what they consider it worth; breaking it up with cross- or shoulder-heads; and giving it headlines that will ensure its being noticed.

The value of big news is decided at the conference at which all the heads of Editorial Departments open their baskets and discuss the leading features of the next day's paper.

It is the chief sub-editor who settles what the smaller items shall be. He may have under him a "copy-

taster," who hurries through the mass of material, making a first selection. He may turn all the stories over, when they have been put into shape, to a headline specialist. Or he may do his own selecting and leave each of his men to put on headings. That is the practice in smaller offices.

In either case the "Chief Sub." can influence the general character of a paper more than any other member of the staff. He has nothing to do with the leading articles; he doesn't think they make any difference one way or the other: "Nobody reads them," he declares. The feature articles appearing on the same page as the leader are out of his department; he does not believe they matter much either. His conviction is that newspapers are bought for the news they contain and for no other reason, except perhaps—he will admit grudgingly—the dress and drapery advertisements of the big stores, which make undeniable appeal to women.

Upon his tastes and interests, then, the nature of the news must largely depend—also upon his conception of what the public like to read.

The chief proprietor can set a general line, though he seldom does; he mostly contents himself with dropping heavily on something which has already appeared or ordering that some particular item shall not appear. Not since Northcliffe died has any genuine journalist proprietor devoted the whole of his time and energy to a newspaper or group of newspapers.

Lord Camrose was once a journalist, but he has many other activities outside his journals. It is improbable that he pays attention to any but the business side of them. Otherwise the *Daily Sketch* would not have issued its placard

WE LIVE  
AFTER DEATH  
(EXCLUSIVE)

nor would it have put on the fronts of London 'buses twin posters, one of which asked

HAVE WE  
LOST  
GOD?

while the other announced

*DAILY SKETCH*  
ALWAYS  
ON TOP

That may seem to betray a lack of humour. I cannot help suspecting it was done deliberately for fun.

Lord Rothermere is a very skilful financier. He was reckoned also a clever business man until he embarked on his disastrous enterprise known as Northcliffe Newspapers. He has never professed any interest in journalism.

Lord Beaverbrook has so alert a mind and so vivid an interest in most things which are going on that he often provides his newspapers with first-rate news-stories, features, or gossip. But his intellect is not of the order which settles down to an occupation or a problem and works through it.

He alternates between liking to figure as the autocrat of his Press properties and disclaiming all responsibility for them. He is not in any sense a newspaper man; does not accept the professional standards which are binding upon those brought up in journalism; has done

more harm to them than any other Press Peer—more, indeed, than all the rest put together.

This harm has been done through the persistence of Lord Beaverbrook in regarding a newspaper simply as a profit-maker, a branch of commerce, a means of making money. He cannot help this slant of his mind. He entered on newspaper ownership without any knowledge of the traditions which journalists value, without discerning that it gave him power over the mind and imagination of vast numbers of people, and that he had thus imposed on him a serious responsibility.

The whole trouble arises from his inability to be serious. No newspaper ever before allowed the cleverest cartoonist of the day to provide antidotes to its leading articles, to ridicule everything it stood for. When you have read the *Evening Standard* leader, you turn a page or two, and there you have Low satirically pointing out what nonsense it is.

A reply to this might be that a newspaper to-day need not be consistent; it can admit any opinions or features likely to increase its circulation. That would be valid if the paper in the case belonged to someone who had no views of his own, no principles to follow, no policy to push. Lord Beaverbrook, however, represents himself as an earnest advocate of a policy, the upholder of a principle, and the exponent of a view. Is it not beyond belief that any man with a genuine conviction should pay a brilliant satirist to make savage fun of it?

This lack of seriousness has been shown, not only in the public conduct of his newspapers, but in their internal management. Beverley Baxter has told in a book entitled *Strange Street* how Lord Beaverbrook appointed him leader-writer for the *Express*, when he was without



any experience of newspaper work. He was then given reporting to do and suddenly made Managing Editor of the *Sunday Express*. Here he was, as might have been foreseen, a failure. This, however, was attributed to the interference of the Editor, the Editor in Chief, and the Manager, so Baxter was given authority over all of them.

The paper became more successful as a result mainly, according to Baxter himself, of publishing the letters of a murderess (Mrs. Thompson) to her lover (they murdered her husband between them) and the memoirs of a jockey (Steve Donoghue), for which £4,000 were paid.

Evidently this low and degrading form of journalism (degrading to the public mind, I mean) seemed to Lord Beaverbrook to be desirable for the *Daily Express*; he advanced Baxter to be Managing Editor of that paper. The circulation was raised, not by skilful editing, not even by hiring criminals or jockeys to contribute, but by what Baxter calls "stupid and costly gift schemes" and by "silly" insurance offers.

So low has the standard of journalism sunk under Lord Beaverbrook's influence that these statements are made, these contemptuous epithets applied, by the Managing Editor himself, who has since found his right place as a member of Parliament and an ornament (he cannot as yet claim to have been useful) to the Conservative Party.

He was, some years before he parted from Lord Beaverbrook, the chief performer in a comic interlude which illustrates the pitch of fantasy to which millionaire ownership of newspapers has brought journalism.

Exasperated, as he says, by his employer's incessant worrying, he went to another controller (Mr. Harrison of the *Chronicle*) who knew nothing about daily papers,

and was offered a salary of £10,000 a year with £1,000 for "expenses." What exactly his position should be was not defined clearly. At once the Editor of the *Chronicle* demanded that his salary should be raised and that he should have equal control. He was confident that with a colleague like Baxter he could turn equality into domination.

Baxter thereupon felt doubtful, and decided to consult Lord Beaverbrook. He was advised to return to the *Express*, and did so.

That incident, with its light upon the folly of controllers, the vast sums they are ready to pay out (far in excess of what really able journalists can be hired for), the playing off one against the other, is a laughable, but at the same time a lamentable comment on the lowering

"Imitation is the characteristic trait of Fleet Street."—  
Kennedy Jones in *Fleet Street and Downing Street*.

of popular journalism from an honourable and responsible profession to a not very creditable or useful trade.

There are, however, men engaged in it as controllers, who have at all events done nothing to lower its standards. Such men are the Rowntrees, who are chief proprietors of what were known as the Starmer Group of newspapers (Sir Charles Starmer, who managed them, died lately), and to them may be added Mr. J. S. Elias, head of the firm of Odhams, owners of the *Daily Herald*, the *People*, *John Bull*, *Debrett's Peerage*, and many other publications. He is a business man all the time—an extremely acute and enterprising business man, not attracted by newspapers in themselves, only in so far as they can be used to make profits. Apart from its political side as an

organ of Labour, he has made the *Herald* the most attractive in appearance of the four "national" dailies, and provided it with several features of special interest. Chief among these is the Financial Page edited by Francis Williams, who is permitted not only to offer sound advice to investors, to analyse the statements made in company prospectuses, to give warning against doubtful flotations; but who is also a penetrating critic of economic and currency systems and experiments. Another writer who helps to bind readers firmly to the *Herald* is Hannen Swaffer: his column is alive, never perfunctory, and provides, it is said by Socialists, the only Socialism in the paper.

Little is known about the present members of the Cadbury family, who are the chief proprietors of the *News-Chronicle* and *Star*, once known derisively as the Cocoa Press. George Cadbury bought them in 1900, in order that they might be made neutral as to the Boer War. E. T. Cook, the Editor of the *Daily News*, was a Liberal Imperialist. He supported the war. Lloyd George, who denounced it, was a member of the Cadbury purchasing syndicate. Cook at once resigned. A. G. Gardiner took his place; he gave the paper both weight and brilliance.

George Cadbury had high ideals. He began by refusing to print betting intelligence, but as this slightly affected the circulation, and as the *Star* lived on its racing tips, he was persuaded to fall into line and to countenance what he considered a flagrant vice of the age.

Had he held out, and at the same time made the paper in all its facets one that should please forward-looking people, he might have won for it a far greater and steadier success than it has had at any time since; he would certainly have influenced the course of newspaper history.

Even at that date large numbers of people were ready to welcome a paper that was honest in its convictions, though they might not share all its views. Since then those numbers have swelled immensely, and they still know not where to turn.

Outside London the men who control newspapers financially are more often concerned with their production. This may be one reason for the superiority of the Provincial Press in a good many directions; it prints more news with fewer headlines, it very often presents it more intelligibly; it takes more trouble to be accurate; it has a steady local advertising connexion and, as its advertisers depend on it as much almost as it depends on them, it can afford to be more independent of them. Nor, with its regular local circulation, need it struggle so desperately to attract readers.

The main editorial object of the Provincial Press outside of the combines is to convey information. In London more importance is attached to the arrangement of news, to the headings put on it, to forceful introductory paragraphs, than to the news itself. The appearance of the pages is coming to be thought of more consequence than what is in them. This has been explained in an ingenious fashion. A writer in the *Monotype Recorder*, a printing magazine, sets it down to rivalry with Broadcasting. The voice on the air has colour in it, warmth, vitality. That is its advantage over cold print.

Print can be skipped or skimmed, can be preserved, studied at the reader's convenience and his reading speed. But the advantages of print "depend on the reader's willingness to exercise in some degree his higher intellectual faculties, judgment, memory, and will. He does not simply sit and absorb direct impressions and sensa-

tions as he does in front of the cinema or the loud speaker. Hence the newspaper of to-day is fighting, not for its existence, but for its psychological influence over the mass of readers."

The popular newspaper controller has changed contents, methods of presentation, and style of writing to suit restless people who have a number of new alternatives to reading.

"To-day he is doing what is most difficult for any professional writer: standing off from the content and looking at the page as a page. For he is realizing that it is only the exceptional man, the 'natural literate,' who is an instantaneous reader. To the mass there is a slight but definite interval between observation, which takes in the invitation and appearance of readability, and the decision to settle down and decipher the matter. It is in connexion with that first rapid and curious glance of the potential reader that the newspaper man realises the accuracy of the analogy between tone of voice and typographic 'tone.'

"The modern newspaper has become a daily news-magazine whose 'by-lines' show that widely different personalities are contributing to it. The typographic reflection of that change is the use of different contrasting display faces for articles, features, and sections. The news-reel has learned to use a succession of commentators instead of only one voice; often the fashion commentary is spoken by a woman—just as a fashion article is headed by a light, decorative display face. One could read the 'by-lines' and thus find out that the paper was not all written by the editorial staff; but variety of display gives the same impression instantaneously."

There is truth as well as ingenuity there. In all directions more and more emphasis is required to seize attention. The newspaper has been swept along by the stream of tendency. In one office pages are schemed and given to the sub-editors for the skeleton to be clothed. This has a most excellent effect on the eye; it achieves balance and symmetry. But what happens if a "deep top" has to be found and there is nothing among the available stories that seems worth such prominence? In that event something must be pushed into prominence and the news value subordinated to the look of the page.

The News Editor does not like this, nor perhaps do the sub-editors; but they must carry out instructions, although they chafe against it. Between them and the News Department there is almost bound to be a feud. Their ideas and the News Editor's seldom agree. On stories that he has worked up with enthusiasm they may look with little favour. His views of relative values may clash with theirs. However, they must manage to pull together or the paper would suffer.

They must be in agreement also about the avoidance of any piece of news that might interfere with the chief proprietor's financial or social aims. There was once trouble in the *Mail* office about a story of elopement in high life. This was published just as the owner and his wife were making friends among the aristocracy. Lincoln Springfield, who was the News Editor responsible (the story is told in his amusing book, *Some Peculiar People*), heard from his chief that "everybody was refusing the invitations to their next entertainment, that people weren't at home to them, and that unmistakable snubs were being administered to them on all sides." A sound rating was administered for "a ghastly indiscretion."

That was a trifle. More serious troubles have resulted

from unfortunate mention of facts that interfered with money deals or speculations, or unfavourable notices of stage shows in which ladies intimately connected with proprietors appeared. Cases are well known to newspaper men which caused unjustifiable sackings. In the United States, Press autocrats have been known to supply lists of companies that must be spoken well of. In one office these companies were known as "the sacred cows." Here orders are promulgated more discreetly, but in certain quarters the British practice is identical with the American.

The News Editor must keep in touch, too, with the advertisement and circulation managers. He will send a reporter round in summer to write up seaside places where the sales are not so good. He will take care that no attention is paid to occurrences which important advertisers are anxious to keep quiet. It would not be as easy in England as it was in Philadelphia some years ago to suppress any reference to the suicide under disgraceful circumstances of a prominent business man whose establishment was in that city. But a good deal can be done in this way.

When actions are brought by persons alleging they were poisoned by food eaten in one of the hotels or restaurants belonging to a firm that advertises very largely, the name of the hotel or restaurant is not likely to be mentioned. In reports of shop-lifting charges against women the shop concerned will not be specified, if it is a regular buyer of space. No attacks on patent medicines are published unless the article denounced is sold by a company that does not make the newspaper Press its principal channel of publicity.

Probably the News Editor will say that he dislikes all this "truckling to advertisers." Most newspaper men

suffer from the feeling that the Press ought to be above purely commercial considerations. This is unfair again. Why should those who control or own shares in newspaper properties subject themselves to a self-denying ordinance that is imposed on no other business? If it is said, in reply to this, that any institution which has the power of affecting the imagination and opinions of masses of people ought not to be run for profit only, then the blame for allowing this falls, not on newspaper owners, but on the community. Left in a commercial age to unchecked

"The Press is not in a healthy condition. A newspaper should depend for its circulation on the value it gives as a newspaper. The newspapers of today do not."—R. D. Blumenfeld, formerly Editor of the *Daily Express*, in *The Press in My Time*.

private enterprise, the Press could not become other than what it is.

About that you must not expect the Managing Editor to feel any qualms. He is a business man. He is there to make profits; if he fails in this, he will not be there long. Before the News Editor has finished sending out his first batch of reporters (others come in later, to stay later) the Managing Editor is in his room.

His job is a natural outcome of the Newspaper Revolution. Before it there was an Editor and a Manager, the one supreme over the reading matter, the other concerned with what was known as "the business side." Now the business side is paramount. No divided empery is any longer feasible. Supreme control must be exercised by a man whose duty it is to co-ordinate all the activities of the newspaper so that they may serve their purpose and make profits.



Managing Editors are of varying types. Some are rather more Editors than Managers, some the other way. Some again are merely "Yes-men" put in by controllers to do what they are told. None have power against the controller; they might have, if they cared to assert themselves; but they are highly paid, and few can face the risk of losing high salaries without a tremor.

Low salaries make men independent because they do not fear the loss of them. The way to make men eat out of your hand is to pay them a great deal.

The Managing Editor decides all questions of expenditure, apart from the daily routine. He may turn from considering whether to send a special correspondent to a war or a reporter to write up a Revivalist preacher in Wales, to discussing the latest dodges of the Circulation Department or the chance to buy a consignment of paper at a low price. He is the channel through which the boss issues instructions to the staff. He keeps a sharp eye on the great man's activities, whether financial, social, political, or theatrical, so that nothing may appear which might cut across them.

At the conference which roughs out the character of the morrow's issue the Managing Editor usually presides. Here it can be seen how far the Editor has fallen from his once high estate. Seldom has he now other duty than to look after the editorial page—the one which contains the leading article and notes, a feature story or article, probably the cartoon; also, it may be, the letters from readers. This is not the invariable practice, but it has become more common. Instead of making himself felt in every department of the paper, an Editor is cooped up in a small corner of it. And in place of one Editor, supreme and all-pervasive, there are now many Editors, each with a province of his or her own.

The News Editor is the most important. The Sporting Editor comes next. Whatever space he demands is pretty sure to be granted. Probably he is too much occupied to appear at the conference: he sends a deputy, who states his requirements. They are seldom challenged. He has regularly, as of right, two pages or more—a far greater space than is given to any other subject; he often supplies matter for the principal news page as well.

The Foreign Editor attains prominence now and again, but only when he has sensational news to announce. Then there are the Features Editor, the Woman's Page Editor, the Social News Editor, the Literary Editor, the Art Editor, down to Chess and Crossword Puzzle Editors—it seems as if the whole office consists of Editors, as South American armies are said to be all generals. Not the entire flock assemble at the conference—only those who have the weightier tasks to perform.

It is to be remembered that no question of policy is discussed at these gatherings—that is, if policy is taken to mean the attitude the paper shall take up towards public matters, social and political. Policy in the sense of the line that will best serve to sell and fill it with advertisements—that is at the back of all minds. For on doing that their jobs depend.

The other kind of policy is dictated by controller to Managing Editor, who passes on the word to Editor or to leader-writer direct. No longer are the opinions of newspapers taken from the headquarters of this or that political party, as they once were (though the *Daily Herald*, as to matters economic, political, and industrial, must pay heed to orders from Trade Union chiefs). No longer need Editors dine out night after night, as the Editor of *The Times* used to, to hear the latest about Government intentions or Opposition villainy.

Controllers have taken to disposing their papers' attitudes to men and measures according to their own whims and fancies. Here is the reason for the Editor's eclipse. The proprietor, who formerly remained in the background, except when titles were going, now likes to be in the limelight. He needs a Managing Editor to look after the profits. What Editors once did he prefers to do himself.

The object of the conference, then, is to plan out a paper that will (a) please the controller; (b) stir the sensations of those who read it; (c) satisfy the advertisers. The question before it is not "What is the most important news, what ideas are being put forward for making life more natural and rational, what are the events of the day that bear upon the future prosperity, perhaps the lives of the masses?" Such events, such ideas, are apt to seem dull. What the Conference must discover is how to thrill or amuse people, how to make them say to one another "Have you seen that bit in the——?" whichever it is.

"Newspaper men must provide something that will interest people who are not really completely adults in the mental sense."—Aylmer Vallance, while Editor of the *News-Chronicle*.

To three London papers and several outside of London the foregoing description does not apply. *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Morning Post*, the *Yorkshire Post*, and a few others, have a character of their own. They are "high-brow," while the others which I have been describing are admittedly "low-brow." The "high-brow" journals do not subordinate everything else to make profits. They do not need to.

Virtue is largely dependent on money in the bank. The well-to-do are not tempted to steal for bread. Mr. Astor, the family of C. P. Scott, the Berry Brothers, the rich men who dominate the *Morning Post*, the banking Becketts who own the preponderating interest in the Leeds organ, not only take a pride in their properties, they can well afford to indulge that feeling.

It is true that *The Times* a few years ago made only £2,000 odd on twelve months' working; true that the *Guardian* could not support itself without the aid of its evening paper, which is of a totally different order; true that the *Morning Post* could not hope to return big profits as the organ of Die-hards (who are dying hard all the time, thus reducing the number of its friends), and may as well therefore be run for some other purpose. We must nevertheless put all these journals into a category of their own, apart from that of the popular Press.

Not alone because they are more serious in their methods of presenting news; also because they approach more nearly to the newspapers of last century, in that they aim at influencing the course of events. They set themselves up as barriers against the flood of change. Their programme is to keep things, in essentials, as they are. The only England they can contemplate with any satisfaction or comfort is an England not intrinsically different from that of to-day—or it would be more accurate to say from that of the day before yesterday—the England of venerable Victoria and Edward the Seventh.

The *Manchester Guardian* seemed in the last years of C. P. Scott's life to be very slowly moving towards a wider outlook; since he died that movement has become imperceptible. It still ponders longingly on the England of Bright and Gladstone, of Free Trade and middle-class supremacy.

Yet no journalist who rates his craft as something higher than a branch of commerce can fail in admiration and gratitude for the *Guardian's* refusal to drop "the banner of the ideal." It is one of the very few newspapers printed in English, whether in Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, or the United States, which one can read with the comfortable assurance that one is being credited with an intelligence. Almost all the others make one feel either that they are produced by nit-wits who can't help it, or that clever persons are treating you as a nit-wit because it's your money they want.

*The Times* falls into neither of those categories. It leaves no single definite impression. It is a blend of oddly obstinate prejudices and back-number loyalties with open-minded perceptions and boldness in facing facts. When it gives a lead to public opinion by interpreting what is in the nation's mind or heart, as it did when the Hoare-Laval plan for betraying Abyssinia was ingenuously published in December 1935, it revives the finest traditions of journalism. But most of the time it is a Tory organ, nervously (and therefore pettishly) opposed to changes, even if they occur a long way off—in Russia, say.

If we compare the circulations of these newspapers with those of the popular Press, we find they are very much smaller. They owe their advertisement revenue to the belief of advertisers that their readers are mostly well enough off to buy the more expensive kinds of goods. They get it, on the strength not of the size, but of the quality of their circulation.

This quality, however, if it exists, does not outweigh numbers when we come to reckon the effect on the public mind and imagination produced by the "high-brow" and the "low-brow" newspapers. Here the popular

Press is by far the more powerful. Once the influence on opinion exercised by *The Times*, and by a few other journals in the same class, was decisive. At that period newspapers throughout the country took their views from these organs, borrowed them often with scarcely any modification. To-day the influence of *The Times* is limited to the small circle of those who read its leading articles.

The same is true of the other papers which appeal to the few. Their discussion of public affairs affects only their own readers, who do not number, in all, much more than a million and a half at the outside. And, as such discussion is in the popular Press scanty and spasmodic, the voters in the mass seldom pay any attention to public affairs until General Elections are at hand, when they become the victims usually of a catchword or a panic fear.

This is the most alarming consequence of the Revolution in Journalism, of which it is now time to trace the history during the past half-century or so.

## CHAPTER III

### HOW THE PRESS REVOLUTION CAME

THERE is no need to go back to the first newspapers, which were a combination of the news-letters circulated during the seventeenth century and the political pamphlets that became so prominent a feature in the early eighteenth. News and views clapped together formed the model of which we can still see something in the newspapers of to-day.

By the middle of the Victorian era this form had become fixed. Gone the frank, often savage, personal talk, the controversial prize-fighting, the satire on the great, which had enlivened the journalism of the first half of the nineteenth century. Newspapers were political organs, so their leading-article writers borrowed from the formal manners, the elaborate oratory of the House of Commons and the platform a heavy solemnity which gained for them respectful hearing.

“It was an unwritten law in the 'nineties that in the preparation of home news for the Press no concession should be allowed to human emotions. Men were considered to be absorbed in politics, law, foreign affairs, money, stocks and shares. Women, if they were considered at all, were taken to have the sombre interests of their menfolk.”  
—F. H. Kitchin, *Moberly Bell and His Times*.

Look back at a morning journal of fifty years ago. The leaders fill a page. Reports of political speeches run to four, five, even six columns. Every word spoken by a leader of the front rank must be printed. There are two or three pages of Parliament. “Foreign intelligence” is

mostly political. I remember *The Times* printing day after day for years despatches about the *Ausgleich* (balance of power) between Austria and Hungary, a matter about which not a dozen persons in England can have cared twopence, but through which thousands presumably ploughed as a civic duty. There was something absurd in that conception of duty, but something fine too in the idea that a good citizen ought to be acquainted with the affairs of neighbour states, however dull they might be.

A column or two of racing, cricket scores in summer, full accounts of Oxford and Cambridge contests; long police and law reports, divorce cases being prominent. The idea that crime-reporting at great length was introduced when newspapers were popularized is mistaken. Delane once wrote, while he was away from the office, to congratulate his deputy on having had so many murders!

Features in the late Victorian newspaper included articles of the heavy kind or in the sesquipedalian style of Sala; a perfunctory financial column with Stock Exchange and market prices; letters to the editor peppered over the whole issue; at irregular intervals a few reviews of books under the headings: "Recent Theology," "Recent Historical Works," "Recent Novels." Music and the drama were more generously treated. Not a play or an opera, not a concert of any note, passed without substantial notice. Yet the conclusion to be drawn from the newspapers of this period was that they served a public interested mainly in politics and in very little else.

Whether the purchasers of these late nineteenth-century newspapers were so absorptive of speeches, so concerned about Bills in Parliament and foreign policy and the strife of Parties, as to read through column after column



of solid reporting, no one can now decide. J. A. Spender, a journalist who can recollect those days, who became famous before they ended, has his doubts about it.

“How many people read pages of Parliamentary reports, or what instruction or entertainment they found in them, was never brought into question.” (*The Public Life.*)

That is certainly true. The conductors of newspapers then did not put such queries to themselves. Yet it is hard to believe that a large number of people bought papers to light fires with or to wrap their boots in when they packed their portmanteaus.

Lord Rosebery, in his airy way, ridiculed the idea that they bought them in order to read politicians' utterances.

“I have no doubt that those whose duty it was to criticize them, to laud or rebuke them in the public Press felt it their painful duty to read the speeches. But did anybody else? Did the man who bought a paper on his way to the city in the morning and an evening paper in the evening—did he ever read the speeches? I can conscientiously say, having been a speaker myself, that I never could find anybody who read any speeches.” (Speech to the Press Club, 1913.)

That was rhetorical exaggeration.

Whether they supplied a want or not, the newspapers were almost exclusively political. Any “scoops” they got (pieces of exclusive news) concerned politicians, their legislative intentions, their resignations, or their retirements. That was the heyday of the political big-wig.

Cabinet Ministers seemed to be really important people. They appeared to be occupying the centre of the stage on which the drama of the nation's life was acted. John Walter the Second, who made *The Times* a great newspaper, was himself a keen political amateur; it was he who set an example which all the Press followed. Had his tastes been literary, he might have moulded the British newspaper on the lines which the French followed. But his was a political age, and the pages of small-type reports of speeches which fill us with repugnance, which make us marvel that they should ever have been endured, were read, every word of them, by a large proportion of newspaper readers.

No help was given by headlines; the type was solid without a cross-head or even a paragraph-break to relieve the strain. This lasted until nearly the end of last century, before it gave way to a new kind of journalism touching life at many more points than the old.

Not that the old had been allowed to flourish until then without attack. W. T. Stead was the first man to challenge its sober self-satisfaction. He invented what Matthew Arnold, as early as 1887, named the New Journalism, "full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts," but "feather-brained" and careless of accuracy. Becoming editor of an evening paper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in 1883, as successor to John Morley, whose assistant he had been, Stead soon showed that he was a man of ideas. "Evenings" were mostly more readable than "mornings." Stead made his the talk of the country.

Northcliffe said that he effected a revolution in journalism. What he actually did was to prepare the way for the revolution which Northcliffe carried through some ten years later. Stead, for instance, took up interviewing,

till then unknown in England. He made his paper livelier, more outspoken, than those of his rivals. They never startled or surprised anybody; what he would say or do next no one knew. He introduced "stunts" (a term derived from the German *erstaunen*, to astonish), and was sent to prison for one that he invented in order to rush the public into forcing Parliament to pass a Bill raising the "age of consent." It was possible then to have little girls of thirteen "procured" as prostitutes. Stead procured one to prove how easily it could be done; the resulting shock to the national conscience got the law altered within a few days. But the law took its revenge. Stead was sent to prison for technically "abducting" the child. By half the nation he was called a martyr, by the other half angrily abused.

As an agitator he was unsurpassed. His limitations as a journalist appeared when he started a morning daily; it was a complete "flop." He tried to educate and enlighten. He had not grasped the truth revealed to Northcliffe that the public preferred to be entertained.

The next pioneer of the New Journalism was T. P. O'Connor. The *Star*, which he founded in 1888, combined in the right proportions entertainment with enthusiasm for causes. It was political, it supported the Radical wing of the Liberal Party (Liberals put up the money for it).

Its profession of faith reads in these days like an echo from another world. Its aim was to improve the lot of the masses of the people.

"The rich, the privileged, the prosperous, need no guardian or advocate; the poor, the weak, the beaten, require the work and word of every humane man and woman . . . Empire, dominion, influence in the

councils of Europe—all these and suchlike things are to us mere pestilent emptiness. The elevation, the more constant employment, the increase of food in the stomach; dignity in the souls; joy, humanity, tenderness in the hearts of the people—these and these things alone represent to us progress, glory, national greatness.”

The attack on privilege cannot have been agreeable to pursy Liberals, with eyes on titles, which most of them in due time received. “T. P.” justified it on these grounds:

“Privilege stands as a barrier on the very threshold of the kingdom into which we would have all sons and daughters of men enter. Privilege degrades alike the man who is and the man who is not privileged. The privileged are made selfish from their earliest years, for they are taught to forget the equality in all essentials of all human beings, to demand too much for themselves, and to concede too little to others; and privilege equally degrades the poor by cultivating unmanly servility. . . .

“The House of Lords, the property vote, the monopoly of Parliamentary life by the rich—these all belong to the edifice of privilege and must be swept away.”

That was written close on half a century ago. At that date no one thought it odd that a newspaper should be founded with such aims. To-day it would seem as strange for a newspaper to avow them as for a grocer’s shop to open with a declaration that its object was to abolish political anachronisms and social sins. The newspaper has become commercial; it is an organ of profit, and, though it may pay some controllers and shareholders to profess devotion to a cause, everyone knows they would

drop it instantly if it turned into a hindrance instead of a help towards making money.

T. P. O'Connor was not, therefore, the real founder of the revolution in journalism towards the end of the nineteenth century any more than W. T. Stead. "T. P." was the first to discover that a type of newspaper reader had arrived who "longed for other reading than mere politics," and for a style of writing less inflated, less conventional in its phrasing. He led the way along the road which Northcliffe was to follow, but did not reach, nor even glimpse, the goal.

While he made his *Star* more readable than the rest, he never even conceived the idea that the purpose of a newspaper was to entertain, not to push reforms; to serve as a pleasant pastime rather than invite its readers to dash off

"A paper that is to sell by millions to a population tiredly following day by day dull occupations must be entertaining."—Sir Norman Angell in *The Press and the Organization of Society*.

on crusades. He, like Stead, was at heart an Old Journalist. Both believed fervently that the Press had a mission—and a great one. Both would have been revolted by Northcliffe's view that causes and convictions were better left alone.

The real Press revolution forty years ago was, as we shall see, the change in newspapers which turned them from organs of opinion to organs of entertainment in order to increase circulation, just as the revolution of the twentieth century altered them again and made them organs of profit by using the increased circulation to

attract advertisers. With the first of these changes neither Stead nor O'Connor would have had any sympathy, if it had been proposed or attempted while they were making Press history. Stead, indeed, refuted Northcliffe's saying about him (that he was a revolutionary) by making the paper he edited more violently an organ of opinion than any.

What he did was to make more direct appeal than was usual to the sensations of his public. What "T. P." showed by his brilliant handling of the *Star* was that the methods of the Old Journalism had slipped behind the intelligence of a generation eager for more stimulating fare.

But with him, too, opinions were paramount. Politics remained the supreme factor, meaning by politics the struggle for improvement in the conditions under which the masses existed. His discovery, which was literally epoch-making, since it ushered in a new form of journalism, was that most people had other interests as well. But there was no reason why a newspaper should not remain an organ of opinion and also touch life at many more points than the Press of that time considered suitable to its rather pompous dignity, its self-satisfied clinging to methods of the past.

Indeed, the *Star* was such a newspaper. Its interests were distributed over a wider field than was common; the writing in it was as good, taken in bulk, as any British daily paper has ever offered (Bernard Shaw and A. B. Walkley, Charles Hands and Richard le Gallienne, Joseph Pennell and Sidney Webb, were all on the staff); it was free from many of the conventions by which journalists were then cramped. Clearly if an evening paper of this kind could be popular—the success of the *Star* was immediate and lasting—it was time to experiment with a "morning" on more or less the same lines

and at the same price—the *Star* cost a halfpenny, all the “mornings” save *The Times* were then a penny.

Four years passed, however, without any effort in this direction; then, in 1892, two halfpenny “mornings” came out within forty-eight hours of one another. One, the *Morning Leader*, was published by the proprietors of the *Star*; its competitor by three or four speculators who never had enough capital to give the *Morning* a fair chance; it soon faded out. The *Morning Leader* lived for some time, but never thrived; it was engulfed eventually in the maw of the *Daily News*, which swallowed one after another its three Liberal rivals in London daily journalism. Neither had the character or breadth of interest which “T. P.” put into the *Star*.

Meanwhile a young man whose name was Alfred Harmsworth—I have called and shall continue to call him, for convenience’s sake, Northcliffe, his title in the peerage—was publishing a string of weekly papers, unambitious, anecdotic, appealing to the half-educated; and making big money out of them. The eldest of a large family, his father a barrister employed in the legal department of a railway company, his mother an Irishwoman of dominant character, this handsome boy was at seventeen making a few pounds a week in London as a free lance or penny-a-liner.

He appeared to be the conventional type of young journalist, wore the top hat and tail coat that were the insignia of respectability in those days, wrote the usual kind of article in the usual Fleet Street language. But he watched intelligently then, as he watched all his life, what was going on in journalism; he saw that changes were in the air.

More clearly than George Newnes himself, he discerned the reason for the success of *Tit-Bits*. Sneered at by

persons of even moderate culture, it was the precursor of a Press revolution that would leave nothing as it had been. Newnes had started it because he and his wife liked reading scraps of information, little stories, personal chatter ; they thought, and thought rightly, there must be plenty of other people with the same taste. They did not understand why the moment was ripe for new publications of many kinds. It was because the new class of readers, taught to read in State schools, wanted something to read.

In 1870 Gladstone had passed the Education Act which decreed that all children should go to school. It took a little time to round them up, to find sufficient teachers, to prepare school buildings. Not until the middle of the eighties did the results begin to be noticeable. Then it was plain that there had come into existence a new reading public, for which next to no provision was made.

It did not occur to the Legislature that, having taught the rising generation to read, it would be prudent to provide them with reading matter, wholesome and intelligent, that would enlarge their minds, strengthen their characters, fit them to be good citizens. Nor did that idea make any appeal to the Church, the Universities, the "upper classes," or the business community. It was therefore left to profit-seekers, speculators, adventurers in the purlieus of commerce and journalism, to supply the books and newspapers that were so powerfully to influence the future of the British race, now for the first time open to the persuasion, the fascination, the nourishment, or the poison of the printed word.

By the mass of the people books were read scarcely at all. In nearly all cottages would be found a Family Bible, though the habit of making it a study was already on the decline. Few but white-collar wearers took in a daily



newspaper. For the "working-man" Sunday journals were produced, over the foul pages of which he could pore in bed until it was time for the public-houses to open. Obscenity was the chief attraction offered to him. One of these horrible sheets paid reporters all over the country to send in cases of loathsome aberration and crime. Happily, either the diseased craving for filth diminished or the self-respect of journalists grew. There is nothing to-day that offends in this fashion. So complete was the change in the *News of the World* that Lord Riddell, its chief owner, was chosen to be chairman of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, and his chief editor was during the same period at the head of the Institute of Journalists.

It was fortunate that this class of paper circulated little outside London. Lord Riddell was the first Sunday newspaper owner who secured a large sale over the whole of the country. He bought his property, when he was a struggling solicitor, for a small sum; it was then selling fewer than 100,000 copies. He raised the circulation to nearly four millions, and he did this by securing in all towns and many villages agents ready to sell it on Sunday.

This was not easy. Sunday observance was still strict. Church- or chapel-going was obligatory for all who wanted to keep their neighbours' respect. Sunday trading was under a ban. Sunday journals had a bad name.

George Riddell nevertheless succeeded in getting his paper sold, and, as it was first in the field, it had a marked and permanent advantage over its competitors.

For the habit of reading a particular newspaper is a habit very difficult to alter. Most people cling to whatever has become familiar. They feel especially fond of a newspaper if they leave their native land. Emigration on a big

scale carried *News of the World* readers into many parts of the earth, and they had it sent to them every week. Many of their sons and daughters continued to take it. Its over-sea circulation is still a strong element in its prosperity.

Save this class of Sunday paper, almost no reading matter was offered to the masses. A few weeklies of an instructional type, *Mechanic's Journals*, *Miscellanies*, and the like; one or two fiction periodicals such as the *Family Herald*; gossip and scandal served up in imitation of *Truth* and the *World*—these and religious papers were all that the new reading public had to choose from—until *Tit-Bits* led the way towards something which was at any rate less hide-bound and more attractive to look through.

Northcliffe's earliest venture was a weekly in the *Tit-Bits* manner. It came very near failure. Indeed,

"The Press has become a most efficient organizer of popular entertainment of all kinds, and especially of games and the gambling that goes with them."—J. Alfred Spender, formerly Editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, in *The Public Life*.

*Answers* was a failure until it set people talking about an ingenious *Answers* puzzle and the prizes to be won in *Answers* competitions. Then it rushed into the hundred thousands. Soon the enterprising young publisher gave it companions—weeklies for women, for boys, for the pious, for the sentimental. The new firm had established itself in spite of the sneers of Fleet Street. Money was rolling in.

For a long while the idea of a new kind of "daily" had been in the young Chief's mind. There was a public waiting for it, he knew, though he did not guess how large that public was. He aimed not so much at making

new readers as at giving those who were already accustomed to buy daily newspapers an article more to their fancy. Thus he planned the *Daily Mail* as "a penny paper for a halfpenny" and as "the busy man's paper," which should give him all that he wanted in a briefer, snappier form. Northcliffe could see farther than most, but he did not anticipate then the immense circulations that were to make space in the popular newspaper so valuable to advertisers and to shift the whole foundation of the newspaper trade.

Resulting partly from the extension of schools, as I have shown, this increase in the number of newspaper readers was due in part also to the growth of suburbs.

Until towards the end of the century most workers, whether they worked with their hands, in offices, or in shops, lived near their work. They could walk to and from it, or take a short omnibus ride. As cities pushed their outer rims farther and farther away from the centre, as land for building within easy reach of the centre went up in price, suburbs arose to house those who were now compelled to live at a greater distance from their occupations. The suburban dwellers had to make daily journeys by train, street car, or bus; they felt the need of something to entertain them, to keep them from thinking, while they travelled for half an hour in the morning and at night.

Here is the explanation of the change in the appearance of newspapers. Once they were read at home, in a good light, with room enough to handle large sheets. "Splash" headings were not necessary, large type and short paragraphs would have seemed undignified. To readers in public conveyances every possible help must be given. Bold headlines must acquaint them with the principal news at a glance. Nothing must seek to hold

their interest for long : it is hard to concentrate attention with passengers getting in and out, with noise and rattle around one.

Nothing likely to induce thought must be set before them. The news must be that of the surface of life, it must arouse surface interest, stimulate shallow emotion. All events must be treated as far as possible from the personal standpoint : there must be more about the persons concerned in them than about the events themselves, unless these were of a sensational nature. Thus a picture of a Chancellor of the Exchequer walking to the House of Commons on Budget Day (especially if his wife walks with him) may be of greater value than an analysis of his figures. Gossip about politicians' habits or eccentricities is worth more space than the policies they stand for or the speeches in which they explain themselves, although something vital to the public welfare may be at stake.

This technique grew to its present perfection long after the founding in 1896 of the *Daily Mail*. In appearance the new paper was kept studiously near to the established organs. The intention was, as I have said, to win purchasers by offering an article which resembled what they were used to and cost only half as much. The founders—Northcliffe, his brother Harold (Lord Rothermere), and Kennedy Jones—were shrewdly anxious not to startle the public. It was a novelty they were putting on the market, but they took care not to let it seem too novel.

They had already tested the effect of their fresh ideas, and with encouraging outcome. A derelict paper, the *Evening News*, had been bought cheap and turned into a valuable property. This had brought Kennedy Jones into the business, had given him his opportunity to exchange the position of a not very successful reporter for that of joint director in the most prosperous newspaper

business of the age. His ability, until this happened, had found little scope. He was brutally told by the editor of the *Morning*, who came as he did from Scotland, but who was a Scot and not Glasgow Irish: "What you are pleased to call descriptive writing is only bathos, and contains no real news."

But "K. J." had in him the capacity for work far above a reporter's. He saw the Old Journalism dying because it would not adapt itself to changed conditions. Its chiefs were men of unprogressive minds. They were unaware of the new reading public. They were content to plod heavily in the paths laid down two generations before. Their interest lay almost exclusively in politics, and they prided themselves on possessing an influence which had passed away.

Byron Curtis, editor of the *Standard*, boasted: "I'm only a humble sort of fellow, but I've a jolly lot of power." That was an illusion. The mid-nineteenth-century Press had power. Cabinet Ministers were afraid of and therefore disliked it. The vote was the privilege of a small number, and that small number was composed of men mostly educated to think for themselves, to weigh arguments, to form opinions of their own. They read newspaper leading articles and were swayed by them, for in those days such articles were written by journalists who had as much knowledge and often more brains than politicians; who could reason their points closely, and who appealed, as a rule, to their readers' intelligence. But that era of political journalism had, Kennedy Jones recognized, been long since closed.

Therefore, when he took to the Brothers Harmsworth an option he had acquired to buy the *Evening News*, he made it clear that he wanted to run it in a different way. Harold opposed the purchase. He was against rash

ventures. But Alfred had the deciding voice. He said "Yes," and he was at one with Kennedy Jones in the conviction that newspapers as political organs were out of date.

Exactly what they were to become in their next stage neither Northcliffe nor his partner, who had far more experience of newspapers, could discern. They were like all other successful business men: they did not foresee what was coming, but were quick to jump to it when it came. They did not deliberately turn the newspaper Press from an organ of political opinion into an organ of entertainment. It gradually took that direction in their hands because they found that, of all their efforts, those they made to entertain were the most warmly appreciated. Accordingly they increased those efforts.

The Old Journalists had never asked themselves whether what they printed was readable. They did not consciously aim at producing journals which would be read. They filled their pages with whatever came in from news agencies, correspondents, local reporters. If the items were intelligible and the grammar sound, they did not trouble their heads as to whether anybody would want to read them or not. There was a certain routine to be followed in producing a newspaper: to this they adhered without thinking about it. If they had been told that the result was dull, they would have been puzzled. They published what they received, so far as they had space. They could not "make news."

This was exactly what the New Journalists did. Not in the literal sense: they did not invent, though of this they were accused often enough by enraged competitors. They enlarged the conception of news, they admitted to their columns a great deal that had been hitherto ignored or left to weekly papers. The *Daily Mail* soon had a

Magazine Section, a Serial Story, a Woman's Page, clippings from the world's Press, political and social news, which became more or less like gossip. If a topic were uppermost in the news, if the public mind were disturbed or intrigued by an event, a mystery, a crime, a large amount of space would be given to it, irrespective of its intrinsic interest. While the Old Journalism asked: "Is it important?" the New speculated as to how much people would read about it.

This was a natural and a necessary change when the newspaper-reading public had been enlarged. It is no less absurd to complain, as many have done, of news being made attractive than it would be to urge that food ought not to be made palatable. A. G. Gardiner once lamented that a reporter sent to the opening by royalty of some new public building in a provincial city gave most of his space to a talk the royal person had with an old soldier, a veteran of the Crimea, and could only spare a few words for the institution, while no reference at all was made to "the citizen who had borne the cost."

What interest could the big public outside that particular provincial city be expected to take in that citizen, or indeed in the new public building? A local newspaper would feature them; a national newspaper would have been foolish to do so.

A similar hasty attack was made by George Blake on Tom Clarke for telling an Imperial Press Conference that the London Press did not want bare facts about the population and the products of British Dominions, but interesting news, which would be the best propaganda. It was by sticking to bare facts that the Old Journalism had failed to satisfy the new public. The *Mail* was right to make "Is it interesting to the mass of decent, ordinary people?" the test of news.

The *Evening News* had pushed ahead by featuring a murder trial. Kennedy Jones dated the turn in the affairs of the paper from the week when he insisted on word-for-word reports of a case which was arousing unusual excitement. Special efforts were made to get the editions containing the latest news of the proceedings into the country for fifty miles round London. After this the circulation went up and up.

Not by such methods did the *Daily Mail* increase its first year's sale of 170,000 copies daily, to half a million

" Cheap newspapers are a menace to the home, with allurements which must be met by another ideal of hope, purer, sweeter, and stronger."—Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Lang), May 1932.

in less than three, and a million within five years. That was not the kind of journalism Northcliffe cared about. He did not then so plainly realize the importance of attracting women readers as he did later on, when the drapery-store advertisements began to be so large a source of revenue. But he did aim at appealing to women as well as men; he was determined not to let the new paper be a crime-sheet. His own taste happened to be opposed to that mode of gaining readers; in any case, those who would be pleased by it were not the readers he wanted.

The mistake, in his judgment, that the earlier half-penny papers had made was that they assumed their circulation would be among the horny-handed. He resolved that he would not in any direction " play down "; he intended that the *Daily Mail* should be read by all classes. He knew, too, that the horny-handed



prefer a paper which assumes a fair degree of intelligence in those who buy it; they resent being played down to.

R. D. Blumenfeld's memory was wandering when he described the *Mail* of those early years as a "glorified *Tit-Bits*." That is exactly what it was not. It aimed deliberately at being a substitute for the "heavies." The idea was not so much to supply a paper different in kind, but a paper which contained all that was of interest in the penny sheets, with other features added.

Certainly the news was simplified. Everything had to be explained in terms easy to understand. There was none of the allusiveness in which Old Journalists indulged, taking it for granted that all their readers had enjoyed a classical education and were well instructed in literature and history. If you quoted *Don Juan* in the *Mail*, you must say who wrote the poem. If you wanted to use the expression "going to Canossa," you must tell the story of the Emperor Henry IV. But there must be no mistake about the public Northcliffe meant to capture. It was the nation as a whole, and the way to capture it, he believed, was to be dignified, though lively, and to give it credit for moderate culture, with a preference for the respectable over the rowdy.

For a time this ambition was unattained. Fleet Street, angry with innovators, derided and abused their creation. Lord Salisbury, who had probably not seen it, sneered at the *Daily Mail* as "written by office-boys for office-boys," parodying the motto Thackeray invented for the *Pall Mall Gazette* ("written by gentlemen for gentlemen" was the original). Men used to take it home under their coats. If large houses had it, it went to the servants' hall, instead of lying with the other papers on the library table.

However, merit always scores, if it gets a long

enough innings. In a few years the *Mail* was a paper that nobody with the itch to be "in the know" could afford to miss. Northcliffe's policy of making people talk about it caught the secret of all effective advertising. Nothing sells largely unless it is spoken of by myriad lips. All that Press or poster advertising can do is to stimulate discussion. First it associates with smoking the name of a brand of cigarettes, or with washing clothes the name of a soap, or with eating chocolates the name of a particular firm. Then those who buy accordingly talk about their favourite tobacco, cleanser, or candy, and the more it is talked about the larger is the quantity sold. The same is true of books, plays, newspapers—everything. Silence is their worst enemy.

Every day, Northcliffe said, we must throw our pebble

"Northcliffe was a craftsman. He would have hated virtually every change in form and style brought into popular journalism during the last ten years."—"A Spectator's Notebook" in the *Spectator*, July 17, 1936.

in the pond. If there are no ripples, we are losing ground. But all the ground gained was held and, in military language, consolidated. For whatever people thought about the paper, they made it a constant topic of conversation. It did not matter, chuckled Northcliffe, whether they praised or blamed. What most of them did was to say: "Have you seen the latest in that awful *Daily Mail*?" and then pay it the compliment of quotation at great length. From the first it was ready to start little campaigns, take up small grievances, go in for "stunts."

Of the last-named the Standard Bread "stunt" was

the most famous. This was aimed at inducing people to eat bread made from flour milled between stones in the old style, instead of bread made from the flour that came from modern mills and had been passed between steel rollers which crushed out some of the most nourishing elements of the wheat berry. A large part of the nation supposed that Northcliffe had some financial interest in the flour that was recommended; another large part set him down as a food crank. The truth was he cared nothing whatever about bread. The stunt was mere advertisement with a dash of good journalism thrown in.

There had appeared in the *Mail* a letter from Sir Oswald Mosley, an old gentleman happily unconscious of the stir that would be caused by his grandson who would some day inherit the family title. The letter praised bread which contained all the properties of the wheat, stated that the writer's household always ate and liked it, offered to send a small sample loaf to anyone who cared to drop a postcard to the editor. Neither Sir Oswald nor the editor reckoned with the passion of the British public for getting something for nothing. A few days after the appearance of the letter Northcliffe arrived at the office to find the entrance, as he put it, blocked by mail-bags. These contained some of the postcards to the editor asking for the sample loaves.

Instantly Northcliffe saw the newspaper possibilities of this. There was evidently great public interest in bread. "Have an article about it every day for a year," he ordered, and long before the end of that time it was not safe to mention Standard Bread in the *Daily Mail* office. The man in charge of the "stunt" narrowly escaped death in two forms—from exhaustion and at the hands of his exasperated colleagues. In the end it

appeared that few people had been converted, but that did not disturb Northcliffe. He had set everybody talking. His "stunt" was one of the subjects most debated, most widely commented on, most joked about. This kind of publicity it was that gave the *Daily Mail* a position in the newspaper world far above its rivals.

The earliest of these appeared in 1900. The *Daily Express* was started by Arthur Pearson, who had, as a very young man, joined Newnes, after winning as a prize in a competition a clerkship in *Tit-Bits* office. He had just left Winchester; clerking did not at all appeal to him. Nor did Newnes see just where to fit this public-school boy from a country vicarage into his staff. He let him prowl around, doing this and learning that, making suggestions. After six months the manager left, and Pearson promptly suggested that he should be given the vacant job. Newnes agreed to let him see what he could do with it; after a while he became manager, though he was not yet twenty.

Four years after this he left Newnes, started *Pearson's Weekly* as a rival to *Tit-Bits* and *Answers*, and on "missing word" competitions rushed it into a very large circulation. Following Northcliffe, as he did throughout his career, having few ideas of his own, he put on the market other little papers and magazines, and in time resolved to found a halfpenny daily, as a competitor with the *Mail*.

His *Daily Express*, which began in 1900, with news on its front page, a practice common in America, but before that untried in London except by the earliest of the "halfpenny mornings," was never, so long as he owned it, a success. It lacked always the assured touch which distinguished the *Mail*. It won, however, sufficient popularity to make it clear to the Old Gang that organs of opinion could no longer hold the field against organs

of entertainment, nor penny papers against halfpenny ones. Both *Chronicle* and *News* saw that they must prepare to make the change. But they did not think very hard about it. When they reduced their price, they copied the *Express* by putting news on the front page. They overlooked the immense possibilities of revenue from display advertisements in that position. The *Mail* for many years took a very high price for its front page—as much at one time as £1500 a day.

Pearson had not foreseen this loss when he decided to put news on the outside. Nor did he stick to his resolve that he would cut loose even more completely than the *Mail* from the advocacy of causes or crusades. He announced at the start that his journal had no politics in the Party sense. "Our policy is patriotic; our policy is the British Empire." But he had not the wisdom or the courage to stick to his declaration. In a short time he put the *Express* at the service of Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign. He could follow Northcliffe's actions but not his thoughts. He did not see that he was reverting to the type of newspaper which was rapidly being displaced.

Pearson had vast energy, but he used it without judgment. When the *Express* started, he was seen doing all kinds of things (even carrying bundles of papers) which took him away from his proper task of keeping an eye on every department and ensuring that all worked together in harmony. Owning one daily gave him a hunger for more. He bought two evening papers, *St. James's Gazette* and *Evening Standard*, and rolled them into one.

This began the process of amalgamating newspaper properties, which has so notably reduced their number since the century opened. Pearson bought also the

morning *Standard* and killed it by ineffective management. When he seemed to be in the way of becoming chief proprietor of *The Times*, Fleet Street gasped. Fortunately for the paper, Northcliffe was lying in wait, and at the right moment emerged to drive Pearson from the field. Disappointed and unsuccessful, he found he was losing his sight. In a few years he gave up newspaper work and devoted his vigour to the service of men afflicted as he was himself. He worked with noble and magnificent unselfishness, winning more respect and more happiness than he had ever enjoyed in his newspaper days.

How had *The Times* so far declined as to be put up for sale? The explanation was that it refused to move with the times. John Walter the Second, who made the paper established by his father the first in the world, left no son capable of carrying it on. John Walter the Third suffered from being born to wealth, position, and the control of a great property. Had his intelligence been strong, his mind supple, he might have overcome these drawbacks. He was, in fact, a dull, obstinate man. His effect upon *The Times* was disastrous. When the famous Delane died, he appointed to succeed him as editor a professor of oriental languages, totally unfit for the post. His next editor was a young man of high intellectual powers, but ignorant of journalism. Under Delane, George Earle Buckle might have developed into a distinguished, if not a great editor. Without any training at all, and with a character lacking in combativeness, he sat for thirty odd years in the editorial chair, suave, dignified, impressive, without ever acquiring the editorial mind.

Buckle was not responsible for the catastrophe of the Piggott forgeries, but he let himself be too easily persuaded to take Walter's view that they were genuine Parnell incitements to crime. Never can there have been

a newspaper sensation more startling than the appearance in *The Times* of facsimiles purporting to prove that the leader of the Irish Home Rule party in the House of Commons countenanced murder and outrage. Parliament nominated a Commission of judges to investigate. When the man from whom the letters had been bought was called to give his evidence, he did not appear. He had bolted to Spain, where he shot himself, leaving a confession of forgery. The reputation of *The Times* was tragically smirched.

Later it sustained a comic wounding through its association with the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and *The Times* Book Club, two despairing efforts to make up losses incurred by the incompetent running of the paper. John Walter the Third was dead now; in his stead reigned an Arthur instead of a John—a bad omen, it was said. The new chief proprietor, who might have saved his property by putting in a first-rate manager, appointed Moberly Bell, a cotton merchant in Alexandria who, as Egyptian correspondent of the paper, had written pungent articles and supplied good information. Of course he was completely ignorant of newspaper management.

The puffing of the *Encyclopædia* by *The Times* became almost a scandal. E. V. Lucas and Charles Graves, by writing one of their comical booklets on the subject, turned it into a joke which set everyone laughing. The Book Club also, though it involved the management in a lawsuit, brought ridicule on *The Times* rather than any serious disrepute. Neither adventure relieved the financial tightness. Nothing could relieve it but skilful and thorough-going reform in every department.

As this could not be applied (there was no one in a responsible position to apply it), the difficulty of keeping shareholders quiet grew and grew, until at last they lost

patience and took their grievance into Court. Then came Pearson's offer, which was not, however, backed by cash; what he proposed was to hand over shares in a new company. Northcliffe, intervening through Moberly Bell, keeping far in the background himself, convinced the Court that money would be more useful than expectations. He thus reached the pinnacle of his ambition as a journalist. He was in control of *The Times*.

For some months this was known to a few only. When the truth came out, many were apprehensive that he would "turn it into a *Daily Mail*." Actually he made at first little change. He tried to work with the existing staff. He strove to make them understand that their crusted habits must be altered, their antiquated traditions abandoned. Saving *The Times* was the toughest problem he had ever tackled. In the end he "rescued it from decline and did much to vitalize it" (the words are those of Wickham Steed, a former editor). After his death, the Hon. John Astor, naturalized son of a Dutch-American millionaire, bought the chief control, but did not exercise it. *The Times* is one of the very few papers over the columns of which the editor has full authority.

The first Lord Astor, an immigrant from the United States, had been, among other things, a newspaper owner in this country. He bought the *Pall Mall Gazette* and put in a clever young aristocrat, Harry Cust, as editor. Cust made it a paper that everyone with a taste for humour and good writing had to see. It carried the new fashion of providing entertainment still further than it had yet gone. It made even politics a subject for humour. Staid and solemn people were shocked when it headed its leaders, which appeared on the front page, with such titles as "Perier, jouez!" when Casimir-Perier was elected President of the French Republic, and "Perier joué"



when he resigned (Perrier-Jouet being then a familiar brand of champagne). Once eccentricity was allowed to head an article "Can't Think of a Title." The *Pall Mall* specialized also in essays with a genuine literary flavour, and ran every day among its Notes on public affairs verses which could without sarcasm be called poetry.

Cust contributed, therefore, to the humanization of the newspaper, but could not make the process pay; its millionaire proprietor tired of it in time, as all millionaire proprietors do, being much happier when they are raking in money than when they have to pay it out.

Perhaps Cust's obduracy in refusing to print articles written by him, "all out of his own head," as one of the staff put it, helped to make Astor decide that he would sell. Cust told him the articles were not the thing for an evening paper, and suggested, half in jest, that he should start a magazine in which they could appear. The advice offered as a joke was taken. The *Pall Mall Magazine* was founded, with a lord as editor (Cust was only an "Honourable") and Astor's pride of authorship gratified.

He had yet another paper, a weekly, called the *Pall Mall Budget*, which was clever and lively; this he burned on the funeral pyre of his viscountess. In other words, he said that, as his wife had been so attached to the *Budget*, he could not bear to keep it going after her death. Actually it was not paying very well.

Astor's irruption into the newspaper world was almost the beginning of the connection between Press and Peerage which has become such a feature of this later age. In time his son and successor in the title bought the *Observer*, in which Mr. J. L. Garvin does his best to counteract the effect of the Christian Sunday by preaching the worship of Brute Force, while a younger Astor is, as we

have seen, the principal shareholder in *The Times*. Neither of them takes any active part in direction—at present. But the knowledge that these important organs are under the potential control of eminently safe and sane owners

“Newspapers have become one of the most available instruments by which the Money Power can make itself felt in politics.”—Lord Bryce in *Modern Democracies*.

gives their fellow-aristocrats and wealthy folk generally a comfortable feeling of security. They never could be so sure of Northcliffe or Pearson.

Pearson's demonstration that a second halfpenny morning could find a public made, as we have seen, the managements of penny papers uneasy. Was a halfpenny to be the normal price? They did not like the idea, but they were compelled to face it. Soon both the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle* reduced their price and gained in circulation.

They had been conforming for some time already to methods of the New Journalism which aimed above everything else at providing good entertainment. Sport

“Tickle the public and make them grin,  
The more you tickle, the more you'll win.  
Teach the public, you'll never grow rich,  
You'll live like a beggar and die in a ditch.”  
—Popular rhyme.

now occupied more space than had been allotted to it before. A large section of the new reading public made it their own absorbing interest. Football began to cover

more columns than racing. Cricket reporting was elaborated into an art of its own with a vocabulary. And now it was that illustrations made their appearance in a hesitant, unobtrusive manner, as if even the popular prints were doubtful about their reception.

At this time it was impossible to reproduce in daily newspapers any but line-blocks—that is to say, blocks made from drawings. A picture paper with illustrations produced in that roundabout way had been running for a number of years, with moderate success. News photographs that had to be copied by draughtsmen lost a good deal of their actuality. Yet the direct printing of photographs by half-tone blocks (made from photographs direct) was possible only in periodicals that came off a flat-bed press, where the contact between the paper and the forme containing type and illustrations was firm and slow, compared with the action of the rotary press. Greatly as the reproduction of photographs promised to add to the entertainment value of the newspaper, no very strenuous efforts were made to discover a process by which this could be managed. In the end it was almost by accident that the discovery was made. It came about in this way.

Northcliffe brought out in 1903 a daily newspaper for women. It was named the *Daily Mirror*; edited by a woman, who had a staff consisting chiefly of her own sex; and filled with matter that was supposed to be likely to interest women. Northcliffe said the experience taught him that women couldn't write and didn't want to read!

Starting as the *Mail* had started with a print of 400,000 on its first day, secured by the spending of £100,000 on making its advent known, the *Mirror* failed to hold half that number (as the *Mail* had done); in a few weeks it was down to 40,000, and still dropping. Fleet Street chuckled savagely. At last these young men had come the cropper

that had so long been predicted for them. Now they would fall out of the race. Good riddance to them !

These malevolents little knew their man. Northcliffe was shaken by the failure, he was puzzled, he was wondering what to do. But he never for a moment thought of giving up the *Mirror*. As for the temporary loss, that did not trouble him. By this time the firm had sturdy financial legs. So he got another editor—a man this time, a young man whose work he had been watching, as he watched everything that went on in the newspaper world. The women were dispossessed, expense was cut down all round, the problem of what to do was discussed day and night.

One day there was introduced into the discussion a man who said he could print photographs. He was editor of one of the many little papers Northcliffe had set going. At first small heed was paid to him. Northcliffe smiled, tapped his forehead. But the man, whose name was Sapt, persisted, won over the editor, was given a machine to experiment with. His efforts were successful enough to justify talk of a halfpenny half-tone paper, the only one in the world. Talk grew into action. The new *Mirror*, planned to offer a little news and a lot of entertainment, appeared ; sprang into immediate popularity, went ahead without a check ; won back in time all that had been spent at the outset and made a fortune for its owners as well.

Here was a fresh blow for papers that were trying to keep up the old tradition. "What the big public wants is to be gently diverted"—that had become clear. Now that photo blocks could be printed on rotary machines, it was certain that pictures would find their way into all daily newspapers. To the Old Journalist this was scarcely imaginable. The prospect filled him with disgust. He still could not see that political controversy, save at

moments of crisis or contest, was a "back number." He could not face without dismay a future in which the newspaper would be something to look at, to be glanced through, to fill up time which without it would be tedious. This was the revolution begun when the *Daily Mail* appeared. Now Northcliffe, its begetter, had completed it by producing the *Mirror*.

To the London Press the difficulties of adapting itself to the change were not very formidable. What was slightly termed the Provincial Press found the transition not so simple. There was no ground for that slight. The Press outside London has at all periods included journals that were as good as any, except that they had not the comprehensiveness of *The Times*. The *Manchester Guardian* has been for a long while in the opinion of many the finest newspaper in the country. The *Yorkshire Post* has kept up an equally high tone in political controversy and in its criticisms of books and plays. Though they specialize in local news, the papers outside London often present national news in a way that leaves behind the "national newspapers." Unfortunately, they have most of them been ready to follow London instead of keeping to lines of their own, as do the two journals I have mentioned by name; and, since their resources are smaller, they are liable to meet with difficulties in keeping up.

Partly owing to this, partly also because they were not in sympathy with such transforming changes, they followed slowly, nor have they ever gone as far in shouting the news by means of headlines and streamers and heavy type, or in making the sensational their chief attraction.

These things came by degrees. The early alterations were not very marked. Yet they made certain arrangements of staff necessary. Some of the older men—dogs who could not or would not learn the new tricks—

had to be sacked. Plenty of young journalists were ready to make papers "bright" and readable, to get "the human touch" into their reporting, to abandon the stodgy and sedate for the frivolous and amusing. They were heartily glad to escape from conventionality and dullness.

Nor were the stars of the New Journalism all of the office-boy type which Lord Salisbury had loftily lampooned. George Steevens, whose articles as special correspondent gave lustre to the *Mail*, had the fine flower of Oxford culture on which to graft a popular style that was English at its best. H. W. Wilson, scholar of Pembroke, Oxford, wrote *Mail* leaders and made the paper an authority on naval affairs. Another of the *Mail*'s frequent contributors was Charles Whibley, one of W. E. Henley's young men, who left Oxford with a reputation for brilliance which he more than justified in London. Both Northcliffe and Pearson made several of their best "finds" among the products of the public schools and the two ancient Universities.

Until now men of this type had served the Press only as leader-writers or reviewers. The New Journalism enlisted them as reporters, descriptive writers, correspondents in foreign parts. It may have been this raising of the social standard in newspaper offices which prompted Northcliffe to support demands for raising pay, which, in general, was meagre. He himself paid generously, setting a standard which startled old owners and managers, and angered them when they were obliged unwillingly to follow. The National Union of Journalists was formed about this time and began to agitate for reasonable rates of pay. Northcliffe backed it up, urged members of his staffs to join. He felt always that he was a journalist himself more than a proprietor.

Thus he was quick to sympathize with grievances, eager to keep up the dignity of the calling.

His reporters were expected to meet on equal terms politicians, society people, city men—anybody whom they might be sent to interview or to sound for information. They must be well dressed, their manners must be good, their bearing without the humility which had commonly marked the reporters of his youth.

He once chaffingly rebuked a special correspondent who had mentioned in an article getting shaved in a hotel barber's shop. "All *Daily Mail* men travel with two valets," he wrote. A joke which had in it a kernel of business perception. He knew what snobs the English are. He was in this English himself rather than Irish: he had in his youth been impressed by signs of wealth and fashion. He discerned the effect upon the public of a paper which seemed to be produced by young men sharing the tastes and habits of the rich. He sensed the value of this effect upon advertisers.

But while he gave riches and social position a higher value than the Old Journalism had allowed them, Northcliffe refused to be deluded, as it was, by the self-importance of politicians. He got rid, for instance, of the quite needless deference with which Cabinet Ministers were once treated, just as he banished the tradition of reporting their speeches at length.

He saw, as no newspaper magnate had seen before (except possibly Delane), how trivial, how insubstantial, the transient holders of office are. They come and go, take this or that office (which does not matter, since they are specially qualified for none), then they disappear and are heard of no more. Why newspaper men should behave to such persons as if they were supremely gifted, endowed with qualities far above the common, North-

cliffe could not understand. The reporters' habit which has grown up since his time of surrounding politicians and flourishing notebooks in which to inscribe whatever words they may deign to utter would have moved him to scornful comment.

This anecdote may have been invented, but it correctly hits off the editorial tone of the later nineteenth century. Mudford, Editor of the *Standard*, is at home, dining. A Cabinet Minister calls. He says to the servant :—

“ Tell the Editor of the *Standard* that Lord Blank is here.”

Mudford, overhearing through the door left ajar, calls out :—

“ Tell Lord Blank the Editor of the *Standard* is at dinner.”

The Press made politicians appear important to the public, but had its own private valuation of them.

Yet, merited as was Northcliffe's contempt for the prevailing type of politician, his success in diminishing the respect felt for Ministers and members of Parliament had lamentable results. Newspapers persuading the nation that politics didn't matter, that the men at the head of affairs were engaged in little games of their own, that their doings could best be disregarded in favour of more amusing and exciting topics, had a good deal to do with what happened in 1914.

By this time the advertiser had become sufficiently a power to exercise some influence over the general character of a popular paper—nothing like such a power as he became a few years later, nothing like so strong an influence as he can wield to-day ; but already a new phase of newspaper history was beginning. In 1913 the usual size of



the popular journals was from ten to twelve pages. By 1922 sixteen pages began to be frequent. That extension of the eight pages with which the *Mail* had begun was entirely due to the growth of advertising.

Much discussion of the possibilities of war would not have suited advertisers of the new kind, most of them selling articles they wanted people to buy at once, though they might not actually need them. It was to their advantage that the papers should lead the minds of readers to more trivial and pleasanter topics. The spending mood could best be cultivated by inducing them to suppose that prosperity had come to stay. When Lord Beaverbrook came into the daily newspaper field he was, in this direction, the advertiser's best friend. His idea has always been to sing a song of sixpence that is soon going to be turned into a shilling. A good financial time just round the corner is what his papers promise. He quickly grasped the truth, too, that the populace

"People reading what is called the popular Press are treated as if they were babies."—G. K. Chesterton.

prefer still, as they did in the time of Isaiah, the prophets who prophesy smooth things.

But he did not buy the controlling interest in the *Express* until towards the end of the War (he bought it for the surprisingly small sum of £17,500). It is with the years before the War that we are still concerned, with the deflecting of the nation's thought from grave issues to agreeable nothings. Attention was fixed on things that were entertaining—this was the final period of the organ of entertainment. Things that boded ill for the peace

of the world, the security of the nation, were kept in the background.

One defect in the popular Press has been from early days a lack of continuous news. A newspaper that treats its readers as intelligent beings will try to put before them not a complete picture of what is happening—that is impossible—but a day-by-day sketch of developments, omitting nothing that seems necessary to an understanding of them. The popular newspaper registers only the high lights. Anything that can be described as a “sensation” is given prominence. On the following day not one word may be printed to show what occurred next.

By most people this passes unnoticed. Few read newspapers for information. Nine out of ten readers seek merely diversion, the filling-up of minutes or half-hours that would grow tedious if they had but their own thoughts to divert them. If you want to drive anything into their minds, you must repeat it, give it daily prominence, refuse to let them get away from it. Advertisers understand this. They have learned that continual dropping wears a way into the hardest of skulls. A name, a catch-phrase, an assertion, does the trick best.

If there had been in the Press between 1911 and 1914 as much talk about war as there is now, its outbreak might have been prevented—almost certainly would have been. The one benefit we have derived from the turmoil of the past years of insane carnage, and the years of scarcely less lunatic conflict which followed, is that the newspapers have been compelled to keep the dangers hanging over us in the forefront of the news. The War came in 1914 like a thief in the night. Nobody, as Mr. Lloyd George (when it was over) admitted, wanted it at that particular moment. The nations “stumbled and staggered” into it. Now every move is watched, every

threatening act reported. Every word spoken or written to reveal or hide intentions flies round the world. Not even the powerful advertisers can make the Press be cheerful. We know the risks we are running. During the years before 1914 these were veiled.

The War taught newspaper controllers a good deal. They discovered, for instance, that there was no limit to public credulity. Under the influence of excitement people will believe anything. Touch their imaginations, make them angry or afraid, and no lie is too silly to impose upon them.

They can be persuaded overnight that neighbours whom they have believed to be kindly, decent folk are fiends in human disguise. This deception cannot be kept up if they come into personal contact with those whom they are bidden to revile. Thomas Marlowe, editor of the *Daily Mail*, could put on record his views that "there are no good Germans but dead Germans"; the soldiers knew better. To them "Jerry" was a poor

"The ravings of journalists in war-time are to the true expression of public opinion what the Spanish Inquisition was to the Christian religion."—C. A. Fyffe, *History of Modern Europe*.

devil forced to fight, as they themselves were.

But it was Thomas Marlowe whose view was drummed into the old women of both sexes who stayed at home and who indulged in orgies of hate, yelling for more and more of the enemy to be killed—so long as they didn't have to do the dirty work at the risk of their own skins. The soldiers' attitude might be revealed, when they were on

leave, to a few relatives and friends, but it had a treasonable look: no newspaper could dare to make mention of such pusillanimity.

For this the Press in general was not to blame. In a mad world it is too dangerous to show that you are sane. Many highly-placed newspaper men talked most reasonably in private, as I remember R. D. Blumenfeld did when he visited the War Correspondents' Château in Spring, 1918, though in public he gnashed his teeth with the most unreasonable. He was at that date Editor of the *Daily Express*, which never allowed it to be thought it looked on Germans as a branch of the human race. Anyone who remained in possession of his wits at that time could afford to let it be seen only in secret.

No like ebullition of hate had been seen before. It was entirely the newspapers' doing. It taught them their power.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESS CONTROLLERS DREAD CHANGE

ONE of the changes of these years was the rise in price of popular newspapers. Instead of a halfpenny they now cost a penny. This meant that they could, if necessary, live on their circulation. By remaining small they could meet their expenses out of the pennies paid for them. But their controllers had no such thought as this in their minds. They were eager—and here again it is difficult to blame them—to swell the papers to as large a size as possible by advertisements.

Northcliffe, as I have mentioned, abused the advertisement staff of the *Mail* for spoiling its appearance by blatant display insertions. He wrote and published a pamphlet called "Newspapers and their Millionaires." Behind every London newspaper with a big circulation there was, he said, a very rich man. There was Lord Cowdray, Oil King; Sir John Ellerman, Shipping King; Sir John Leigh, Cotton-waste King; the Berry Brothers, Coal Kings; "and the rest of them." He might have named also Mr. Cadbury, Cocoa King, and Lord Beaverbrook, erstwhile Cement King of Canada. In a short time there was added to the list Lord Rothermere, one of the emperors of finance.

This was a new development. Northcliffe, a journalist, felt it was a dangerous one. He foresaw journalists being superseded in the direction of newspapers by advertisement staffs. He guessed that the profit motive would

soon outweigh every other, when men who looked at a newspaper as a business proposition should gain complete control.

How could they, accustomed to direct all their energies to the making of money, be expected to set any other aim before them? Little they cared about the appearance of a newspaper. If it were all advertisements, the better they would like it.

Northcliffe's half-crazy lament over the domination of this side of the *Mail* (he made it while his mind was giving way) was the more fierce because he himself had started the snowball which rolled to so enormous a size. The notion that newspapers could make very large profits from advertisement revenue was not conceived until the *Mail* reached its million circulation. Even after that it did not gain ground very quickly, either among advertisers or in newspaper offices; it took still a few years to root itself firmly.

Before then it had not been worth while to pay highly for advertisements in the Press. The number of its readers was not sufficiently large. As soon as they began to run into millions, the case was altered.

Now began the second transformation of the popular newspaper—from an organ of entertainment to an organ of profit. Gradually it ceased to be a bundle of reading matter with a few advertisements. Gradually it grew into a bundle of advertisements with some reading matter added, as an inducement to people to buy and look it through.

Partly cause, partly result of this was the vastly enlarged expenditure on newspaper production and, more especially, on distribution. Publication at Manchester for northern readers became necessary, with a second office, leased telegraph and telephone wires, duplicated expenses

of many descriptions. Special trains ran from London carrying newspapers only. Canvassing for circulation grew into an expensive item after insurance came into vogue.

Newnes had given purchasers of *Tit-Bits* an insurance against injury in railway accidents more than twenty years before any daily newspaper adopted this plan of securing readers. When one started it, the others felt they must follow. They were soon sorry it had been thought of.

The *Daily Chronicle* it was which led the way with insurance coupons. Was it a coincidence that the owner of the *Daily Chronicle* was a paper-maker (Edward Lloyd)? He would be more disturbed than others who were not paper-makers by the waste of it which resulted from fluctuating sales and the consequent "returns." A newspaper which could tell how many copies to print with a certainty of selling them nearly all would gain, Mr. Lloyd may have argued, an advantage over its rivals.

He did not keep that advantage long. There was a rush to follow. Competition grew fierce. Every now and then benefits were increased and the cost raised. At last agreement was come to, and all offered the same.

Circulation managers say insurance must never be dropped. Advertisement chiefs did not at first like inviting people to buy papers for any other purpose than to read them; they feared advertisers would discover that a great many bought them for the sake of the insurance and nothing else—did not trouble even to open them.

Later, when competition coupons for crossword puzzles and the like had to be cut out and forwarded with solutions, it was not uncommon for one person to buy several copies of a paper and, after clipping the coupons, to throw them away without looking at them.

Advertisers did not seem, however, to look with dis-

favour on insurances. They saw that they caused the papers to be bought by more people; they reckoned that almost all buyers would, at any rate, turn the pages. They continued their purchases of space. In 1922 the revenue of London morning newspapers from advertisements was estimated at £9,000,000 a year and that of evening and Sunday papers at £4,000,000. The *Mail* alone took £100,000 a year from the shops in the Barker and Harrods combines. Its revenue from advertisements was then round about a million pounds a year.

Two consequences of the rise in the price of advertisements due to the rise in circulations were:—

(1) that advertisers became more anxious to know exactly how large circulations were, and what was their quality.

(2) that they reduced the number of papers—in one direction so drastically that London's "evenings" were diminished from nine to three.

The introduction of the Net Sale Certificate by Northcliffe was a master-stroke designed to show how far ahead of its competitors the *Mail* at the time was. Until then it had been possible for newspapers to be vague about the number of copies actually sold. It has been explained that a great many of the papers sent out are returned unsold. It had not occurred to advertisers to ask for a statement of the number that did not come back. Nor had it occurred to any newspaper owner or controller to offer such a statement until one of them was in a position to use the Net Sale Certificate as a weapon against the rest.

But, while this told advertisers how many persons bought a paper, they were still without information as to these



persons' social position, needs, tastes, and spending capacity. They still have to find this out for themselves, or to guess at it and take a chance.

When an advertiser gets his puffs in front of the right public, he can rely on making that public buy whatever he wants to sell. Out of a hundred people who habitually take aperients, seventy-five can be dazed into buying a certain brand by seeing it continually pushed at them. Out of the same number with enough money to run a costly car, at least eighty-five will buy the one that is reckoned the most fashionable.

Many things depend for their sale entirely on lavish advertisement. An ointment was at one time made familiar to everybody at a cost of £100,000 a year. Its sales became so colossal that the directors of the company fancied they could sell it without publicity. They cut down their advertising, and the sale almost dried up.

Yet sometimes publicity fails because it does not touch the right spot. A blood tonic was trumpeted energetically; it hung fire; multiplying the red corpuscles meant nothing to people. Someone had a bright idea. "Advertise it as a hair tonic." Success came at once.

All that is the ABC of advertising, yet no one engaged in the publicity business has learned exactly to assess the value of space in this or that newspaper—the class of readers, that is to say, and the number who can be counted on to ask for goods which they see advertised.

Some newspapers do all they can to suggest that they are favourites of the aristocracy. The *Mail* led the way in this, as in so many other directions. At one period it had the most intimate Society notes; it carefully avoided the vulgar sensationalism that has marked its more recent career, reducing both its circulation and the amount of its advertising. Its aim was then to show that it appealed to

the "best people." This became with a good many imitators a regular part of their technique.

Here is an illustration of it. In the *Evening Standard* that has been delivered while I am writing this I see, as I glance through it, four portraits of very ordinary-looking young women. One is the wife of a baronet (his name I never heard or read before) who has had a baby. Number Two is engaged to a peer's heir. Number Three is to marry a knight (unknown). Number Four is described as "a regular 'young married,' daughter-in-law of Lady Augusta Fane."

The news value of all four put together is nil. The only reasons for printing the photographs are: (1) to give advertisers the idea that the paper has a fashionable circulation, and (2) to play on the snobbery which is equally distributed among newspaper readers generally, with the object of persuading them that they are still living in an age when titles were of some account.

Most advertisers have ceased to be deluded by these lures. They know that titled people are often hard-up. They would rather be sure that their wares are brought to the notice of a solid, respectable section of the middle class. Those are the people they want to appeal to. They are always looking for them.

Sometimes they may seem to show little discrimination in allotting their favours. That is often to be explained by their employing agents to allot them, and by the existence of friendly relations between some agent and some advertising manager or canvasser. That pains are taken to estimate the quality of circulations (though the estimates may be worth little) is proved by the steady preponderance of "ads." in the *News-Chronicle* over those in the *Herald*, although the *Herald* sells two millions a day, and the other only a million and a half. The notion

persists that the *Herald* is a working-man's paper, and that the *News-Chronicle* is still purchased mainly by families of the "Nonconformist conscience" type.

The tradition that the *Mail* is a better advertising medium than the *Express* rests on firmer ground. The *Mail* keeps a large proportion of its readers who began to take it when it had solid merits. The appearance and contents of the *Express* suggest that it is cleverly concocted mainly to please youngish men without serious interests.

No matter what effort is made to analyse circulations and to forecast the response they are likely to give to an advertisement, buying space in the popular Press is at best a gamble.

Now as to the suppression of newspapers by the advertiser. He does not, of course, stamp them out in person, nor does he buy them up and let them languish, nor does he instruct owners or controllers to shut them down. He uses a negative method. He refuses to advertise in them.

Sometimes his hand may be forced. He cannot stand out against a huge circulation. When the *Herald* was in the hundred thousands, Mr. Selfridge was asked why he would not take space in it. He replied courteously that he found it sufficient for his business to use certain other papers. The *Herald* with two million purchasers he cannot thus neglect.

But very few firms can afford to spend so lavishly as Odhams have done in building up, buying circulation for the organ of the Trade Union chiefs. Usually newspapers die if they are not plentifully nourished by advertisements. The history of the *Herald* illustrates this. Established by George Lansbury as a strike sheet in 1912, it struggled along in a very small way until it was defeated by the War. Re-started in 1919, it had to struggle against

the apathy of the workers which had killed the *Daily Citizen*, another Labour organ started in 1912; it was a war casualty. Whether the *Daily Worker*, which made its appearance in 1930, will be able to grip more firmly the interest and loyalty of a sufficient number of the masses to make it a success has yet to be proved.

The failure of the *Herald* to do this so long as it was under Party management was due to its small size, its poverty which prevented it from offering insurance, the impossibility of getting a complete paper containing late news into the northern parts of the country and into Wales (its rivals published at Manchester as well as in London), and the lukewarm Labour sympathies of all save a small section of the working classes. George Lansbury found himself forced to depend largely on support from sympathizers, and when this proved, as it always does, a collapsible buttress of putty, he turned the paper over to the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party. They ran it for some eight years, working up the sale at one time to between four and five hundred thousand copies a day. But that number of purchasers did not interest advertisers. In continual subsidy lay the only hope of keeping it alive. The Labour Party had dropped its contribution; the Trade Unions could not face the prospect of carrying the cost alone. Odhams, the publishers of many journals, took it in hand, and by immense vigour forced the sale up until it reached within less than five years two millions, at that time the largest of all.

Every sort of circulation "stunt" was used. Clouds of paid canvassers went about securing registered readers, gifts were offered to unpaid boosters who could enrol their friends, competitions with very large prizes were announced one after another. Fearless enterprise and dogged

persistence had their reward. Advertisers were compelled to come in.

Nothing like this had been seen in the newspaper world before. Only a firm very rich in resources, with public confidence behind it, could have successfully come through such a desperate fight.

How much was spent no one outside that firm's offices can tell. It was in 1921 that Kennedy Jones, who knew as much as anybody could know about the newspaper business, put the figure needed to start a popular daily morning paper at half-a-million pounds sterling. Contrast that figure with the £13,000 spent on the production of the *Mail*! Here is another contrast. Early in this century £400,000 was named as a fair price for the *Daily Chronicle*. In 1918 it was bought by Mr. Lloyd George for £1,600,000. Just at that time began the boom in newspaper advertising. Within eight years the paper was sold for three millions. Probably the India merchants who bought it for a reason never explained (unless it was to provide a job for Lord Reading) paid an outside price. They kept it only two years, then Lord Reading sold it to Mr. Harrison for less than two millions. Two years more and it was dead.

If a paper with a sale of just under a million could not live, what chance could there be for really small circulations such as most of the nine London evening papers had twenty years ago? It is rather less than that since Sir Robert Donald bought the *Globe* for £4,000 and found he had a very poor bargain. Nothing could be done with it. The financier, Clarence Hatry, became part proprietor, but did no more than pay losses. It soon collapsed, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* did not long after.

Under the old conditions these papers had got their little bit of advertising, they had covered their office and

contributors' expenses by the pennies or halfpennies of their purchasers, they could just manage to exist, even if they made next to no profit, or, like the *Westminster Gazette*, none at all. When advertisers discovered that it paid them far better to use the papers with very large circulations, no matter how high the charges were, the small paper was doomed in the national field. In the local field it can still keep going. Many small journals live on local advertising and do pretty well. They may be better productions than the "nationals," since they do not have to make frantic efforts to amaze, to startle, to thrill.

In London there is no local advertising that can pay very high space rates. Unless a London morning paper can get national advertisements, it must go under. "Evenings" are in little better case. And the national advertisers do not want too many papers. It would actually suit them better if the four morning "nationals" were merged into one. That one could hardly charge them as much for space as they pay on four accounts at present, and they would be saved a lot of trouble.

It has been asked why advertisers do not run a newspaper of their own and give it away, as they could well afford to, seeing that it would not have to make profits. The answer is that they lack cohesion and that a strong prejudice against anything given away would have to be broken down.

Were the Radio to be used for advertising, they would no doubt use it and cut down the space they now buy from newspapers. This would cause a crisis in the popular newspaper business, and might have catastrophic results. We shall see that catastrophe is indicated when we come to the discussion of Radio news.

Along with the transformation of the popular daily into

a purely commercial enterprise has gone, of necessity, the care for accuracy which was once the mark of the competent journalist. It was carried, as many good things have been, too far. *The Times*, when I worked for it, employed two men to read through every line that went into the paper and make certain that no errors crept in (of course they did creep in, all the same). These two men were quite apart from, and far above the printer's readers, who check all proofs against copy and correct compositors' mistakes. They were next in dignity to the Editor. They were styled Assistant-Editors. And that was their job—to prevent inaccuracies and faults of style from marring the pages of *The Times*.

*The Times* still does its best to be accurate (except about Russia). So do the *Telegraph*, the *Morning Post*, and most of the excellent newspapers that are labelled "provincial." They do not succeed. It is impossible that they should. But they do try to live up to a certain standard of trustworthiness, an endeavour which the popular papers abandoned long ago.

This is a natural consequence of advertisements becoming the most important part of them. Reading matter takes a secondary place. It must be there, but why worry very much about it? What do mistakes matter?

This causes frequent difficulty in discovering what has happened. When a prominent surgeon died in a hospital, *The Times* and the *Daily Express* announced correctly that his death occurred while he was in the operating theatre awaiting the patient. Other accounts were:

*News-Chronicle*: Died while preparing to go to a private house to perform operation.

*Daily Herald*: Died while visiting a friend.

*Daily Mail*: Died in the middle of the operation.

This was of trifling importance. So was the colour of

the Duchess of Kent's eyes, which were described on August 30, 1935, as blue and on August 31 as brown (the same issue called her hair "fair" in one column, "dark" in another).

Equally unimportant was the disagreement as to the value of jewels stolen by burglars in May 1933. The *Daily Mirror* gave it as £10,000, the *Daily Mail* as £15,000, the *Daily Express* as £20,000, and the *Evening Standard* as £25,000.

It was desirable, however, that the public should know in that same year how the national finances stood. Yet there was no agreement about the deficit which the Budget revealed. It was put at £3,000,000 by the *Daily Express*, £3,323,000 by the *Daily Mail*, £8,600,000 by *The Times*, £5,000,000 by the *Daily Telegraph*, £32,000,000 by the *Daily Herald* and *News-Chronicle*. All these were examples of mere carelessness, wrong calculation, or defective eyesight. More regrettable are the deliberate perversions of fact which betray a cynical disregard for exactitude.

Frequently there appear statements of a startling character (such as the assertion by the *Express* that Russia and Japan had come to an agreement about the Far East), and, when they are denied, either no notice is taken or a correction is tucked away in an obscure corner.

Knowing that their readers are of the type which pays more attention to pictures than to print, Picture Editors have been known to attach to news photographs whatever captions seem likely to discredit opponents.

After a Hyde Park gathering of unemployed "marchers," the *Express* published an agency picture with the words below it:

"A casualty during a disturbance between hecklers and socialist supporters."



The same photograph in the *News-Chronicle* was described as :

“ Ambulance man attending to a fainting case.”

More daring was this exploit. The *Express* published on October 30, 1931, a photograph of a crane unloading cases of gold sent to France from the United States. On November 24 of the same year this photograph appeared again with a caption stating that it showed a cargo of “ unwanted Soviet butter ” being landed in this country.

That was an example of too careful economy. Now for one of enterprise over-bold.

On May 25, 1932, an early edition of the *Express* included on its front page a description of an Empire Day pageant, organized by the paper and arranged to take place in Hyde Park on May 24. This description was printed under the headings : “ Thrilling Climax to Empire Day. Thousands Cheer Historic Scenes.”

The historic scenes were sketched in detail and readers were told how at the end “ the slender figure of a girl robed in white, representing Peace, stood enthroned before us in a single beam of white light,” and how “ we sang as the darkness fell.”

In later editions appeared a headline

### HYDE PARK PAGEANT CALLED OFF

and a few lines stating that the whole affair had been cancelled.

Faking is not a new practice. A story used to be told against an early illustrated journal called the *Pictorial Times*. A message was sent from Scotland to say that Queen Victoria had “ gone to see the shearing.” Then (I quote from Mr. Mason Jackson’s work on *The Pictorial Press*) “ the conductors of the *Pictorial Times*, being anxious

to present their readers with a perfect record of the royal doings, forthwith set an artist to work to produce a pleasant pastoral scene, with a group of shepherds shearing their sheep—not knowing that ‘shearing’ in Scotland means cutting the corn, and forgetting for the moment that sheep-shearing is not usually done in the autumn.”

Nor is it a new thing for news to be presented in such a way as to create prejudice, though this was never before done with the same reckless effrontery as most newspapers displayed in their treatment of Soviet Russia and some in their distortion of Spanish Civil War news. Lord Rothermere’s *Evening News* used this method ingeniously when it turned a Reuter message stating that

Russian doctors will to-day examine the three Reichstag fire prisoners to determine the effect on their health of their long imprisonment.

into

Russian doctors, says Reuter, are to-day examining the three men to see what effect—if any—their imprisonment has had upon them.

It is quite possible that the sub-editor who made that verbally slight but effectively misleading alteration was a Communist himself. But he knew that Lord Rothermere looks every night under his bed to see if a Bolshevik is concealed there, and he felt that he ought, in the interest of his employer, to give the story a twist. “If any” just did it.

Even if the wording of a telegram is not altered, its contents can be turned into propaganda for careless readers by the headlines put on it or by contents titles announcing it. Thus the result of elections in Danzig was called by the *Daily Mail* “Triumph for Nazis,”

and by the *News-Chronicle* "Shock for Nazis." This is a common form of distortion.

Another is to ignore any occurrence or any pronouncement which does not fit in with the Controller's views. As a result of newspaper attacks on conditions in the Russian logging industry, an English timber-trade delegation made inquiry on the spot into what was denounced as slavery. Their report showed that this and the other charges were groundless. Not a single paper in which they had appeared took any notice of it. So a member of the party, Mr. W. O. Woodward, complained.

Sir John Gilmour, while he was Home Secretary, made a speech in which he referred to training centres for the unemployed as "concentration camps," and remarked that "as a soldier, he knew the value of discipline." No report of this appeared in any London paper save the *Daily Herald*.

"When I read grotesque distortions of incidents which I have seen with my own eyes and which do not appear to call for the smallest embroidery, I wonder how it is possible to believe any newspaper story."—Sisley Huddleston, former Paris correspondent of *The Times*.

Accusations of dishonesty against journalists in the past have rested on the belief that they wrote opinions to order. C. E. Montague lent some credence to this by his amusing novel *The Hind Let Loose*, which showed a leader-writer producing articles for each of the two morning papers in a small town, one Conservative, the other Liberal. But it was very rare for a man to write anything that went against his convictions. Most leader-writers of my acquaintance in the days when leaders counted for anything were furious Party men.

Now a worse form of dishonesty is practised. Sub-

editors misrepresent news to please their employers, no matter what their own views may be. This is more likely to deceive : what is printed as news makes deeper impression than opinions.

It is not the national newspapers only which mislead in this way. The *Morning Post*, describing a party of Russians on a visit to London, said, "All had the drawn and hungry look which follows privations and deep suffering." The same men appeared to the *Manchester Guardian* reporter to "look very much like well-to-do Lancashire artisans, sturdy and obviously healthy."

Often such distortions go beyond the wishes of proprietors. In the *Life of Sir Archibald Salvidge*, the Liverpool publican who was boss of the Tory Party in that city, it is related that he remonstrated with Lord Beaverbrook about a campaign in the *Express* against the high price of beer. Lord Beaverbrook replied : "Say no more. What's the campaign? The price of beer? I'll stop it. I never hit my friends. If a friend of mine assures me I am hitting him unfairly, I stop. Say no more. Good night."

The Editor at the time was R. D. Blumenfeld. Peremptory orders were given. Not a line further appeared.

It was once a tradition of newspaper ownership that the Editor must be supported. Millionaire controllers treat their Editors like office-boys. Lord Rothermere openly rebuked Thomas Marlowe for a *Daily Mail* attack on the United States. Even controllers who are not millionaires have autocratic habits. Two successive Editors of the *News-Chronicle* were dispensed with as a result of internal friction.

Editors, however, have themselves lowered their position since the days when proprietors treated them with respect. They have lent themselves to practices at which

the old type of editor would have shuddered. It was R. D. Blumenfeld who invented for his employer Pearson and Joe Chamberlain the slogan "Tariff Reform means work for all." He himself tells this with an appearance of pride, and it seems that Chamberlain, to his discredit, was pleased with it, though no intelligent advocate of Protection with even a slight knowledge of economics and conditions in Protectionist countries could regard it as anything but humbug.

It had little power then, for the reason that it was denounced as humbug by newspapers more numerous than those by which it was adopted, and many of these latter gave it only half-hearted support. But if the popular Press were to be united, as can easily be imagined, the interests of all the four national papers being identical, almost any folly or crime could be forced on the nation.

No Jewish persecution could have been carried on in Germany if newspapers had been free to discuss it. Mussolini would not have used poison gas against Abyssinians if even a few Italian journalists had been allowed to urge the shame and vileness of that inhuman act.

Indeed, it was only the ignorance of some British newspapers and the cowardice of others that made the Treaty of Versailles possible. Those which foolishly assumed that conditions could be devised to crush the German people; who adopted the view of *The Times*, after the War ended, that "the cause of civilization was identified with that of the Entente"; who felt with the weak and ill-informed Bonar Law that

"if Germany were to disappear under the sea, Great Britain would be better off than before, because German competition would be removed,"

inflamed the stupider part of public opinion: the rest, excepting the *Westminster Gazette*, had not the courage to invoke sanity. How can a paper which exists to earn dividends dare to take an unpopular line? It would not be fair to its shareholders. They have not invested their money with the idea of guiding the nation aright. They are not of one mind on any subject, save that they want as good a return as possible on their money.

Had the Press been controlled at the end of the War by men as wise as Wellington, who would not have the French humiliated and harried after Waterloo; as generous as Clarendon, who refused in 1856 after the Crimean War to make "what John Bull would call a glorious peace—that is, disgraceful to Russia," they could not, as men of business and as trustees for shareholders, have risked disaster to their papers by breasting the tide of lunatic arrogance. Statesmen, with but their own reputations at stake, did not dare to swim against that tide. Why should commercial adventurers, responsible for the funds of many besides themselves, be weighed in a different scale, tried by a higher standard?

Here is the worst evil of the commercialized newspaper. By its very nature it is unfitted to guide. It cannot proclaim truth regardless of consequences. It cannot put the public interest first. It must earn profits. It must not thwart the advertisers' wish to lull the public into a spending mood. It cannot afford to risk alienating purchasers by telling disagreeable truths.

In the hands of a strong, progressive, independent Editor a newspaper in the position of *The Times* might give a wholesome lead to public opinion. At one time the views of Printing-House Square (round which the office of the paper is built) were copied into numberless journals all over the country. Sometimes they were

lifted as they stood: there is a familiar journalists' tale of a provincial editor too hurried to write a leader who clipped the first leading article, wrote "What does *The Times* mean by this?" at the top and printed it word for word. Often passages were quoted with acknowledgment. Usually, in matters of national rather than Party interest, the tone of *The Times* was the tone in which the Press generally spoke.

*The Times* now reflects reasoned, progressive opinion far too seldom. Buckle made it the obedient mouth-piece of Tory Governments. The Thunderer became the penny whistle. With occasional breaks, it has for the whole period of Geoffrey Dawson's second editorship (that is, since 1922) supported Baldwin with dog-like fidelity. It might over and over again have interpreted the feelings and the intellect of the more thoughtful section of the community. It has, on the contrary, fallen into step with the "blear-eyed majority."

It praised the Versailles Treaty as the most just that history could produce, and, when Hitler tore it across (not without justification), admitted that it was difficult to defend. It stigmatized as crime the Hoare-Laval proposal to buy the Italian burglar off with part of what he was packing up: yet, when he had gassed the householder and made his robbery complete, it argued that the best thing to do was to be as friendly with him as we could.

During the disturbed and puzzling kaleidoscope of happenings in the international sphere, since Peace broke out with worse effects than war, newspapers of the better kind have offered no steadier advice, no suggestions based more firmly on principle, than those of politicians. While the popular Press has dissuaded all who use their minds intelligently from believing what they read, the more responsible papers—those which at any rate profess

to be something more than organs of profit—have equally disinclined such persons to attach any weight to their views.

Not alone by those who are Socialists or drawn towards Socialism is that distrust of newspaper judgment voiced. It may be found among people of all opinions. Even Die-hards complain: "You never know what they will say next."

"It is not an accident that the largest circulations are seldom or never on the side of advanced opinion."—J. Alfred Spender, formerly Editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, in *The Public Life*.

For they dare not assume the openly Die-hard position. They feel compelled now and then to pay lip-service to progressive aspirations. Even Lord Rothermere, who after printing for months in the *Daily Mail*: "They will cheat you yet, those bloody Junkers," advocates a return of the Hohenzollern Empire with its Junker train—even he is too wary to suggest that rule by a military caste of boobies and bullies would be the best thing for Britain. Lord Beaverbrook's spiteful attacks on all the machinery set up in the hope of preserving peace are interrupted at intervals by perfunctory remarks about war being a bad thing.

Thus the effect the newspapers produce is one of see-saw. They are "to one thing constant never," though their prevailing moods vary from glum apprehension to fierce annoyance. Their uppermost feeling is dread of change.



## CHAPTER V

### DAMMING THE STREAM OF CHANGE

EVER since the War ended, the Press has been doing its utmost to induce a return to pre-War conditions. It has, for example, backed up vigorously the efforts of the queer crew who occupy the places of what used to be a fairly dignified and self-assured, though unintelligent "London Society."

These people, uncertain of themselves, conscious that their time is nearly up, do all they can to keep the old social fabric standing. They tread the dreary spring and summer round of Epsom, Ascot, Eton and Harrow, Goodwood, Cowes. They shoot in the autumn, hunt from October to March. Their dances, treasure hunts, surprise parties are chronicled in fashionable gossip columns or pages, with well-simulated snobbish admiration.

In this, as in many other phases of journalism, we see the faces of newspaper controllers turned desperately towards the past. Uneasy in the present, alarmed about the future, they will not have anything discussed on its merits. The test for all events, all measures, is: Do they threaten capitalism? And as this threat is implicit in almost everything that happens or is urged as necessary, we seldom see in newspapers a frank consideration of occurrences, proposals, or ideas. Prejudice is always creeping in.

It is not by their leading articles that they influence the public mind. These are no longer an important part of a newspaper—except in *The Times*, where they are read abroad and too often interpreted as statements of Government policy. By the treatment of "news" a more

insidious and lasting effect can be produced. People remember what is told them as a fact far longer than they can bear in mind an argument or exhortation. Appeals to their thinking capacity are quickly forgotten ; a twist given to their imagination endures.

If every opportunity is seized to mention and exaggerate our yearly contribution to the funds of the League of Nations, to dwell on the cost of education and other social services, to exalt naval and military officers (Air Force chiefs are not yet placed in quite the same category ; they are so new), to represent the speeches of Tory politicians as weighty and patriotic, while those of Labour men are ill-informed and almost treasonable—by these methods “ a way of thinking ” is laid down, and if enough people can be persuaded to tread it, it becomes, in Sir John Seeley’s phrase, “ the foundation of the State.”

Another cunning plan is to arouse loyalty to the Old Order by playing up the monarchy, by keeping royal persons continually in the news, creating a superstitious reverence for them, an attitude almost of worship.

In harmony with this is the attention paid to the doings of titled people, keeping them in the limelight, exaggerating their importance, though not by asserting it. No ; that would at once put people on their guard. The newspapers convey these ideas far more effectively to their readers’ minds.

All relations of peers are worth putting into headlines and on contents bills, whatever they do.

Peer’s Niece Hurt in Car Smash.

Marquis’s Daughter Divorced.

Duke’s Son in Police-court.

Mystery Death of an Earl’s Sister-in-law—

these are a few I have noted.

If a young woman goes into training to be an architect, the heading is "Peer's Niece becomes Draughtsman." When the daughter of a needy earl was known to be earning money as a dancing partner, the newspaper excitement was intense.

"A Duke Opens his Grouse Shoot" was the heading under a half-page picture in the *Mail*. "A London Girl's Romance: Secret Engagement to Baronet" was featured in the *Evening News*. All marriages arranged between titled persons, or even with one in them, are "romantic."

That a peer has some innate quality to distinguish him from the common herd is the belief of the *Liberal Star*, expressed in a paragraph about one who opened a shop of some kind:—

"Not all the customers of the Earl of March—Freddie, as his friends call him—have realized that they have been served by an earl."

The same journal, which once printed the daily protests of T. P. O'Connor against aristocratic humbug, now serves it up in this style:—

"Chatsworth without the Duchess of Devonshire would still be beautiful, but I do not stand alone in believing that the trees would hold their heads less high and the flowers lose something of their radiance."

Even Nature, it seems, is affected by the nearness of an aristocrat, like a butler or a floor-walker in a shop.

Now, I have explained that this is partly done as a bait to catch advertisers; to make them believe that papers are read by the aristocracy, and must, therefore, give plenty of aristocratic news.

But this is not the whole story. Simulated snobbery for money gain is accompanied by the resolve to keep up as far as possible "old England." I do not mean that the controller says to the Managing Editor: "Play up the peerage," and that the order is passed on to sub-editors, to reporters, to all whom it might concern. But the men and women on the staffs of newspapers are wide enough awake to sense what is expected of them. They may feel contemptuous, but they need butter with their bread.

By some this facet of the popular Press is attributed to the necessity of appeasing the snobbish hunger for news about the aristocracy. But the present generation cannot be called more snobbish than the last; most observers would say it is less so. How, then, account for what is a new habit by saying that newspaper readers want to-day more of this kind of thing than they used to get? They may actually want less of it, but it is pushed on to them—for a purpose.

How far that purpose is effected nobody can say. Indeed, it is hardly possible to reckon or even estimate the range or final depth of newspaper influence. So far as immediate result goes, that is perceptible easily. The first time I remember having the immense power of the newspaper over the imagination of the crowd brought home to me was when the airman Hawker and his companion who had fallen into the sea with him reached London after being almost given up for dead. The *Daily Mail* managed, alone, to work up such excitement that an enormous gathering of people waited for them at the railway station.

I asked myself then what limit could be set to the consequence of an appeal, not by one newspaper, but by several, for action which would not merely fill the approaches to a railway terminus, but affect the course of events, of

history. I am asking that question still. Neither I nor anyone else knows the answer to it.

Suppose all the newspapers, or almost all of them, were to shout in chorus that the country was being ruined by inept democracy, or that it had been insulted by some other country and must wipe out the affront in blood, would there be an affirmative or a negative reaction? Nobody can tell.

It may be that half the number of people who read newspapers still believe all they read. Until twenty years ago the proportion was probably ninety in a hundred. Of those who discuss public affairs, by far the greater number still repeat statements with which a newspaper has provided them. Yet we know little, scarcely anything, for certain about the possibilities of this tremendous force, which is also a flourishing industry. It has been interpreted to the public only in flattering, insincere speeches by politicians (who are mightily afraid of it), and in books which make little attempt to mirror more than its surface aspects.

The superficiality of such books, the insincerity of such speeches, make them entirely worthless. Both authors and orators pay tribute to what is called "the influence of the Press." But they never define it, they do not speak of its limitations, they avoid saying exactly what it is.

Of direct influence the Press has very little in matters which the mass of us are capable—or think we are capable—of judging for ourselves.

Not even the *Daily Mail* at the height of its power could persuade people to eat Standard Bread or to wear a Winston Churchill hat. In 1906 three-quarters of the Press clamoured for the continuance of the Conservatives in office: the Liberals were put in by the largest majority known since the Reform Act (1832). In 1929 all the

newspapers but one predicted disaster if Labour should rule, yet the vote for Labour was larger than ever before. In 1935, although most of the papers sneered at or ignored the League of Nations Union ballot, eleven million persons took part in it.

In all these matters the public made up its mind without paying attention to what the newspapers were saying. It knew that it liked the look of white bread and disliked the Churchill hat ; it was sick and tired of Balfour and his friends in 1906 ; in 1929 it had had for a time as much of Baldwin as it could stomach. The eleven millions who disregarded sneers and silence about the Ballot wanted, above all things, peace.

I could offer many more illustrations of failure to affect opinion on questions which the public feels competent to settle, but I must pass on to cases in which opinion is affected. In all these the subjects are remote from the experience of the mass of people, or else the mass are influenced unconsciously, induced by suggestion to take a certain view or react to a certain emotion, hark back to some half-forgotten prejudice, or shout patriotically for war.

On matters of foreign policy newspapers are easily able to drive public opinion this way or that—unless, as in the instance of the Ballot I have mentioned, special pains have been taken to instruct it. An outstanding example of such driving was the creation of enthusiasm for the *Entente Cordiale* between France and Britain. Up to 1904 our long-seated distrust of the French was undisturbed. It had even been strengthened by the attempt to annex for France a piece of territory on the Upper Nile. This was promptly squashed by Kitchener as being detrimental to British interests in the Sudan and Egypt, but it left a feeling that France was still hostile. The

Germans, on the other hand, had up to then been spoken of by the newspapers with friendly respect. Were they not related to us, almost our cousins? Had they not sent us our Royal Family? Did they not love home and home-life—so unlike the French, who lived in cafés and restaurants, and were notoriously immoral?

In 1904 all this was altered. We were to look upon Germans with suspicion, upon France with cordiality. The affection of Parisians for King Edward VII and his reciprocal delight in visiting their city were made the most of. The German Emperor's "insults" to the King, his uncle, to Queen Victoria, his grandmother, and to the British nation (above all his telegram to President Kruger at the time of the Jameson Raid into the Transvaal Republic) were recalled with acid comment.

This was the beginning of a campaign, carried on by the newspapers with vigorous enterprise, to persuade the British nation that Germany was the enemy, France the friend. It was from the start completely successful. The one public man who saw the danger of it was Lord Rosebery, and he lacked the courage to speak his mind. The nation obediently did as they were told. "Father said 'Turn,' and we all turned."

No newspaper, during the years which saw this psychological preparation for war with Germany going on in Britain (the years from 1904 to 1914), urged that war was desirable or even necessary. Few spoke of it as possible. But almost all contained day-by-day suggestions that we might be attacked, that the Germans were dangerous and unscrupulous trade rivals, that their fleet was a menace to our sea supremacy, that there were some things no fellow could be expected to stand!

Even the *Round Table*, staid and statesmanlike, took it for granted, in an article on what would happen in

Lombard Street if war came, that the war would be against Germany. For years before it actually did come the rhyme satirizing Balfour's curious aloofness passed from lip to lip :

I was playing golf that day  
 When the Germans landed.  
 All our soldiers ran away,  
 All our ships were stranded.  
 Such were my surprise and shame  
 They almost put me off my game.

Again, newspaper editors were aware that General Grierson, high up at Army Headquarters, had spoken of the British Army as "the little pebble that would throw out of gear the German military machine, the most extraordinary the world had ever seen." They knew that Mr. Wickham Steed, famous foreign correspondent himself, had talked with Clemenceau and King Edward at Marienbad about the certainty of a German advance through Belgium. Knowledge of this kind coloured the editors' news even more than their views ; they picked out, they gave prominence to the items which made the thought of enmity familiar. Without any direct incitement, the Press so influenced the public mind that it accepted war as inevitable, as a step towards a better world, Germany being treated as a Power which worked for wholly evil ends.

There was nothing new in this Press campaign. Public support for the Crimean War (1854-5) had been worked up in the same way. More recently (1896-9) newspapers had spread the idea that the Dutch Republics in South Africa must be eliminated. In each case the complete ignorance of the issues involved and the interests implicated rendered the task easy. Few people make any effort to follow affairs abroad, few can resist



a statement that one view is patriotic and another disloyal. They have no knowledge, no principles or prejudices, which might enable them to check up on the propaganda handed out to them.

Even affairs at home are misty and mysterious to the masses. It is still widely believed that Labour cannot hope to govern because Labour men are mostly poor and could not find the money required. In many rural areas the secrecy of the ballot is ridiculed, and electors vote to please their employers lest a worse thing happen to them.

Not even the most elementary ideas about economics find lodgment in the heads of the many. A newspaper can persuade them that nationalization of land means taking away their gardens and allotments; that, if the Banks are interfered with, they will lose their post-office deposits; that communal ownership of industries is a vague dream which, if turned into reality, would cause universal disaster.

Another department in which they are equally at sea is that of Currency and Finance. And here until lately as little was known in newspaper offices as outside them. At the General Election of 1931 the influence of the Press was great. The word went out that the Gold Standard was in danger and that all good citizens must rally to its aid.

Not a large number of citizens, good or bad, had ever heard of the Gold Standard. Swift said of some institution in his time—I think the Triple Alliance—that the public did not know whether it was a dog or a horse. The British electors were in much the same state. They rallied, however, at the newspapers' trumpet call—and a few weeks afterwards they were reading in the same prints that going off the Gold Standard was the best thing possible for the country.

If, after that, fewer people took "the influence of the Press" as seriously as they once did, no one can be surprised. The incident increased that "public distrust of news" which Kennedy Jones had called "the most notable feature of journalism" eleven years before.

None the less, although its direct power over opinion has lapsed, what the Press can do indirectly is beyond calculation. It can weaken character; distort value; fill feeble minds with hopes, alarms, hatred; cause attention to be turned to matters that ward off thinking and away from those which concern the welfare of nation and world.

How few of us would not smile pityingly at the suggestion of thinking as a duty! At no period in the past that I can recall has the wish for self-improvement and for the amelioration of human conditions everywhere been so openly sneered at. This we owe to newspapers which deliberately represent frivolity and amusement as the chief aims in life, decrying serious pursuits, serious consideration of aims, cultivation of intelligence.

Controllers would excuse themselves by asserting that they have no choice as to what they shall print. They exist to satisfy public demand. If they are told that they create the demand, they shrug their shoulders. Why should they dispute it? Why should they seek to justify themselves? Their profits do that; and, in addition to big dividends, they have the satisfaction of knowing that they are staving off the evil day of change.

Useless to remind them that damming the stream must cause, and always has caused, floods. France, Russia, Mexico, Germany, Spain, our own country—England at the date of the Reform Bill, 1832—all teach the same lesson. It is a lesson, however, to which Ruling Classes turn deaf ears. They believe the dam will hold back the

water during their lifetime. "After us the flood," they say, and intimate cynically that it will not inconvenience them.

Hence the endeavours—successful, most of them—to divert the mass-mind from cogitation which might lead to changes by offering it agreeable substitutes for constructive thought. The crossword puzzle, for instance, has been very serviceable. Even *The Times* has put aside its dignity and fallen for it (which may have lessened the shock to old readers when they saw a first leader devoted to the rules of Contract Bridge). The crossword-puzzle mania is a bull point for philosophers like the celebrated Dutch Professor Huizinga, who maintains that folly is greater in this than in any precedent age.

Poring over the definitions intended to mislead is not an entirely imbecile occupation. There arises even a sense of intellectual superiority when the spaces are filled up. It is in the nature of a lightning conductor to carry the over-weighted mind of the intellectual and the sharpened intelligence of the masses (the outcome of schools for all) to a safe "earth," instead of letting it flicker among ideas that would be dangerous to rulers.

Here also is the motive—sub-conscious it may be but unmistakable—for so vast an amount of space being given by the Press to sport. If the answer is made that the public wants it, I retort that the public has been taught to want it by the newspapers.

Let me offer proof of this. For many years before lawn tennis became prominent in the Press there was excellent championship play at Wimbledon and in tournaments both English and foreign—better play, some old stagers assert, than is to be seen now. Nobody wanted the long reports of it, many of them written by players themselves, the gossip about them, the interviews, the

rumours, the accounts of their journeyings, which are printed to-day. The interest was worked up, as an interest in any game might be with equal success.

One paper started it, others followed. At first the response was weak. The devotees of football and cricket were inclined to sneer at lawn tennis. "Game for women!" But for some reason the papers kept it up. Had this any connexion with the appearance of advertisements from racket- and ball-makers? At any rate the tennis boom continued, and the demand for full news of matches as well as personal stuff about players became insistent. The trick was done.

It is certain, also, that the betting habit has been created by the Press. It has spread along with the increase of newspaper space given to it. I say to betting rather than to racing, because no interest would be taken in the races if no money depended on their results.

The Ironic Spirit must smile when it remembers that the lead towards making the English a nation of gamblers was taken by the *Star*, which was founded by T. P. O'Connor, a journalist with high aims and deep sympathy for poor folk, and later owned by the Cadbury family, who have proved in many ways the sincerity, up to a point, of their religious and social principles.

I have twitted the Cadburys on an earlier page with lacking the courage of their ideals. I have also sketched the dilemma of a newspaper controller who is trustee for the interests of others and who sees circulation slipping away. It would be unfair to blame harshly men who, to save the property under their care, carried on what they personally held to be an immoral traffic. But it is a national disaster that no man has had both money enough and "guts" enough to run a national newspaper for the very large number of people who know that betting is a

"mug's game" and who like to feel they are being treated as intelligent beings.

Much of the financial strength of London evening papers lies in their morning editions, which are betting sheets undisguised. These are on sale soon after nine; their contents bills proclaim triumphs of the day before—so many winners spotted, so many tips proved correct; and offer predictions as to coming events. Later editions beginning between three and four make every possible effort to be first with the results of races on which large sums have been wagered.

From London this unhealthy stimulation of credulity and greed has spread to the rest of the country. It has affected not the popular papers alone. Even the *Morning Post* is not above putting out a contents bill: *The Horses to Follow!*

As to sport in general, the whole Press makes it appear to be an important element in the national life—for a reason that requires no searching out. When we wish to keep a conversation off serious topics, we turn it on to pleasant trifles. The newspapers, anxious to steer the public mind away from thoughts of change, see they can do this only by occupying it with other matters.

Lord Rothermere's prescription for banishing thoughts of this nature at the end of the War was to march military bands about and let there be plenty of racing. It was not a flattering estimate of his countrymen's intelligence, but events showed it to be shrewd. More or less, the popular newspapers work on the same theory. As little about issues of life and death, of content or misery, whether at home or abroad; as much as possible to divert attention from them.

Sport has this double value: (1) it makes appeal to the lowest common denominator of the human intellect;

(2) continual absorption in it still further enfeebles the thinking faculty. This result need not follow the playing of games, though it very often does ; it is almost unavoidable when they are read about to the virtual exclusion of all other interests. Alert attention to public affairs is incompatible with making a book on the week's racing or wondering which teams will win next Saturday's football matches.

It is just this alert attention that the Press controllers are determined, if they can, to smother. For the sake both of their own fortunes and of their advertisement revenue they hope to prevent the British nation from thinking. From thinking about anything. From thinking especially about economic and political change.

The Press, being under the control of very rich men, naturally makes every effort possible to ward off threats

" A newspaper in London is a source of political power and I am prepared to spend some money on it."—Lord Rhondda (D. A. Thomas).

to wealth and privilege. No complaint could be made against this if their control were acknowledged. But, instead of compelling them to put their names in a prominent position in every issue, the nation allows them to occupy a position of power without responsibility.

Many still cherish, therefore, the notion that newspapers are independent, that they give their opinions honestly, and seek only the public good. An uneasy sense that this is not so has been slowly making its way into the more perceptive minds among us, but is a long way yet from pervading the entire nation. Its penetration is delayed by the tactics of the newspapers themselves. They try

to attach public attention to anything which does not require thinking about. They exclude as far as they can all topics bearing on the economic and political future of this and other lands.

Thus the public mind is cheated of its proper and needful nourishment, which is honest debate about everything. Because the Press is partly owned by large, amorphous bodies of shareholders and controlled by the very rich men who own the other and more profitable part of it, it is impossible to get issues of the first importance fairly put before the People. They are looked at from the angle of great wealth.

This has not been so before. That newspapers in general have always taken the side of the well-to-do is undeniable. But they never took it so whole-heartedly, so furiously, as they do now, and there was always a minority of voices raised on behalf of the struggling masses. What chance is there to-day of a paper being started with the aims which T. P. O'Connor announced in the first number of the *Star*? None whatever.

With very few exceptions, the whole of the daily and Sunday Press is controlled by very rich people, most of whom are able to dictate to a number of papers their attitudes towards public affairs. Opinion is formed by batteries of gramophones giving out tunes supplied by half a dozen men with enormous financial and industrial interests.

What are the exceptions?

The *Daily Herald* is on the side of the workers so long as the workers are the under-dogs. But it belongs to a capitalist firm—a firm, that is to say, which must make large profits or perish. How could it reasonably be expected, if its profits were threatened, to refrain from

throwing in its lot with those who would try to protect them?

*The Daily Worker* just manages to keep going, and will in time perhaps attract as many readers as the *Herald*. So far its penetration has been shallow. The habit of buying papers with the large number of pages made possible by large quantities of advertisements has unfortunately taken firm hold. Whether the *Worker* will be used as an advertising medium when it has a million or two million purchasers cannot be foreseen.

Of the Sunday newspapers one only is free from control in the interest of Things as They Are. That is *Reynolds News*. It has a fine Radical tradition behind it, and since it was taken over by the Co-operative Press, a branch of the Co-operative Movement, it has vigorously upheld the workers' cause. Its national rivals include :—

Title.	Controller.
<i>The Sunday Express</i> .	Lord Beaverbrook.
<i>The Sunday Dispatch</i> .	Lord Rothermere.
<i>The Sunday Pictorial</i> .	Lord Rothermere.
<i>The Sunday Chronicle</i> .	Lord Camrose.
<i>The Empire News</i> .	Lord Camrose.
<i>The People</i> .	Mr. J. S. Elias.
<i>The Referee</i> .	Mr. Isidore Ostrer.
<i>The News of the World</i> .	Sir Elmsley Carr.

A list of headings in the Sunday Press made not long ago showed the kind of topic which it considers most in demand :—

BOY SHOOTS POLICEMAN DEAD.	RAZOR ATTACK ON WAITRESS.
ENGLISHMAN STABBED TO DEATH IN NIGHT-CLUB DANCER'S APARTMENT.	LITTLE GIRL'S TALE OF MOLESTATION BY MYSTERY MAN.
MAN WANTED SWEET-HEART DROWNED.	SON WHO KILLED MOTHER.



DESERTION OF WIFE FOR ANOTHER WOMAN.	HUSBAND CHARGED WITH MURDERING
BRUTAL ATTACK ON LITTLE GIRL.	WIFE.
NAKED MUTILATED BOY'S BODY ON A BICYCLE.	YOUNG MARRIED MAN VISITS HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM.
SCHOOLBOY'S FATE IN LONELY WOOD.	MARRIED MAN ACCUSED OF KILLING GIRL'S BABY.
DAUGHTER CHARGED WITH MURDERING FATHER AND ATTEMPT- ING TO MURDER MOTHER.	ALLEGED ABDUCTION BY 25-YEAR-OLD ENGINEER. GIRL FINDS FIANCÉ ALREADY MARRIED.
CLERGYMAN'S WIFE AND FRAUDULENT CHEQUE.	

An analysis of one Sunday newspaper, which might have been the analysis of any one of the more sensational kind, showed that crime and divorce occupied twenty-five columns and sport thirty-five. These were the main contents. To the affairs of the nation four columns were given, to fashions seven, to films six.

In a different class are the *Sunday Times* (Lord Camrose) and the *Observer* (Lord Astor). Both devote several pages to notices of new books, flanked by publishers' display advertisements. This feature has developed during the last ten or fifteen years. It cannot be said to have been anything but a disaster to literature, as a purely commercial policy must be to any branch of intellectual or imaginative exertion. The enormous number of books published has lowered the standard in every department.

Nearly forty years ago Augustine Birrell found the output of books even then "astounding." He deplored their number, for, he said, it destroyed their reputation. "A great crowd of books" was "as destructive of the literary instinct as a London evening party of the social

instinct." He went on : " They succeed one another in breathless haste, each followed by a noisy crowd of critics bellowing and shouting praise or blame." And he went on to ask : " Were a paper to have no advertising columns, do you suppose it would review half the new books it does? "

In the *Observer* Mr. J. L. Garvin has for a large number of years indulged his peculiar form of hero-worship, whenever he could find a hero. He is the type of writer who needs some prominent figure about which he can twine himself, as ivy creeps round the trunk of a tree. He began in his youth with Parnell, the Irish Home Rule leader. He then clung to Joseph Chamberlain, and by his violent advocacy of Tariff Reform did more than any other single factor to break up the Conservative Party and cause their utter rout in 1906.

Later, after making several experiments with unsuitable " hosts " (to use the scientific term), he found in Mussolini the perfect Strong, Silent Man of his Kipling-esque imagination. It is a delusion to suppose that the *Observer* is bought for his articles, though it may have been so once. If it were not a first-class news sheet, it would have declined long ago.

Of the two weekly reviews which may be thought to influence opinion, one, the *Spectator*, is capitalist, the other, the *New Statesman*, anti-capitalist. Their circulations are about equal. They are serious, well-informed, usually fair in their comment. A few years ago the *Spectator* was moving leftwards, but the engines were reversed when an interest in it was bought by a wealthy Liberal Free Churchman.

How the *New Statesman* is financed has always been a mystery. It must have lost a great deal of somebody's money. Now it flourishes as never before. Its domestic

Socialism is inclined to be hazy, its international orientation rather strongly tinged with Liberalism. But its stand is always on the side of the workers; it exposes with useful effect the way of the oppressor and the fallacies of capitalist argument.

Among the monthly reviews there is one only on the Left. The *Labour Monthly* does good work as the organ of intellectual Marxism, of which, as applied to present conditions, its Editor, Mr. Palme Dutt, is the leading exponent in Britain. The rest have Right tendencies, more or less pronounced.

That is true also of the mass of periodicals, most of them illustrated, which profess no political faith, but continuously do everything possible to make their readers fear change, believe that the system in force is the best possible, and distrust all who ask them to believe that it could be improved.

The greater number of these publications make their appeal chiefly to women. It might seem, at first glance, absurd to regard them as organs of capitalist propaganda.

“They are so silly! Some contain almost nothing but pictures of vapid young men and women in what is still called Society, amusing themselves in seasonable and expensive ways. Others are full of helpful hints for women in small homes, stories slushily sentimental, and chat about the royal family. How could this sort of thing affect anybody’s thinking?”

The same question might be asked about the Woman’s Pages of the daily newspapers, from which these are a few typical paragraphs.

“Nowadays, when nursery staffs are small, Nannie’s [Nurse’s] summer holiday presents a real problem to the mothers of Mayfair.

The Hon. Mrs. Noelwyn Hughes told me she had just had entire charge of her two babies for a week of Nannie's holiday and found it most exhausting."—*The Daily Telegraph*.

"Hunting women have their own beauty problems. One is how to keep on a make-up through a long day with hounds and yet not appear made-up" (followed by a description of a face treatment that would solve this problem).—*The Daily Telegraph*.

"Lady —— is fair and doll-like. When after her honeymoon she appeared as one of the 'young marrieds' wearing diamonds, which somehow seemed to lend her assurance, we all realized at once that she had ceased to be a young girl to become a married woman."—*The Evening News*.

"The intelligent woman alters her face to suit the seasons or the frock she is wearing. . . . Navy-blue eyelashes are to be popular this autumn for evening wear. Finger-nails will not be so heavily lacquered as they are now."—*The Star*.

That style of journalism may be ridiculed or damned as utter rubbish. How could it have an effect on women's minds?

Well, whether in England it is deliberately planned for that purpose or not, it does. In America planning is admitted. The *New York Times* stated some years ago that

"the Woman's Page is one of the most carefully thought-out departments, on the theory that the influence of the family is counted on to sway the man from Radicalism. . . . You hardly notice the propaganda, even when you're looking for it with a microscope, but it is there. It is in the weave and the woof, rather than in the conspicuous pattern. You find it in similes, 'like soap in the home of a Bolshevik. Some novelty!' The agitator is taken down from the dignity of his soap-box throne and flippantly advised to bathe."

In English newspapers the method is rather to play upon vanity and the interest in babies. One of them put out a bill about four children born at the same time :—

### QUADS CHRISTENED PICTURES YOU WILL LOVE.

The idea is to treat women as creatures engrossed with “ the home,” with frocks, with make-up, to refuse them recognition as intelligent beings, and to hope they will accept the place assigned to them.

Snobbery, too, is relied upon to keep them attached to the class system. It is taken for granted that

“ nice ” people must be guardians of the established order ;

the aristocracy are to be admired and if possible imitated ;

the rich are the only friends of the workers ;

it is “ common ” to hold any opinions but these.

Week after week this is ground into the uninstructed minds of very large numbers of women voters. Its effect is stronger and more lasting than that of any direct argument could be.

So far as the popular Press can make it so, the social system in Britain is still based on the principle which Walter Bagehot called Deference. He was not in the very least sarcastic, this Liberal banker and economist, when seventy years ago he wrote the book that is still the most clear-sighted treatise on the British Constitution in existence, and when he said that this instrument of rule has grown out of a society in which everybody looks up to and bows down to somebody else.

At the top the sovereign, a legendary figure, demands deference from all. Then come various grades of persons

enjoying privileges and exercising authority. These defer to one another, and then at the bottom are the toiling masses who regard all above them as their "betters" and behave accordingly.

That, in brief, was Bagehot's analysis; it is essentially true still. In a volume of vapid memoirs, that will be of value to historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for its ingenuous picture of an aristocracy given over entirely to amusing itself, Mrs. Hwfa Williams, friend of King Edward the Seventh and of all his friends, tells how, as a member of the Primrose League, she went to canvass for a Tory candidate in Hoxton, a poor part of London. "I shall never forget," she says, "the welcome I received from even the poorest people. 'Of course, lady, we will vote to please you,' they said."

Unfortunately that bears the stamp of truth upon it. The "poorest people," seeing an expensively dressed woman with an almost fairy-like atmosphere of delicate aloofness from the usual conditions of existence, and having been taught to think of the class she belonged to as far above them, are liable to "defer" in contemptible fashion. Their minds are habituated to the idea that the proper, inevitable social structure is one with a few wealthy, privileged, leisured people at the top and the working classes, who provide the few with their luxuries, ranged in layer upon layer below. Encouragement is given, too, to hope that by luck or cunning some of the under-dogs may force their way into the regions above (examples: Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Snowden, and, until his recent misfortune, Mr. J. H. Thomas).

Against this vast millionaire-press apparatus for the creation of snobs there are set a handful of Co-operative publications which, excellent though they be, do not really enter into rivalry with the enemy output. They ought to

compete everywhere with the Hide-the-Light Press. Until they do, the difficulty of getting large numbers of electors to put their own interests before that of the class which lives by owning must continue to be very great, if not insurmountable.

Here is a state of things—this domination of the Press by very rich men—in which everyone not blinkered by obstinate prepossessions must recognize a social risk. That the possessive and privileged should be afraid of any alteration in the economic system which would make their children start equal with the children of everyone else is easy to understand. No one could reasonably object to their opposing such alterations by legitimate methods. The methods I have described are not legitimate ; they are, moreover, even for themselves, very dangerous.

Being in control of the chief means to influence the mass of people against such alterations is liable to fill them with a dangerous and all-too-fallible self-confidence.

## CHAPTER VI

### NEWSPAPERS AND WIRELESS NEWS

I HAVE called the Press the chief means of moulding public opinion. At the moment that is accurate. But other means exist which promise to become vastly more powerful. I mean, of course, Radio.

Fifty years ago Lord Salisbury (the famous one) said that the country which he ruled as Prime Minister was "governed by the spoken rather than the written word." He meant that the speeches of politicians did more to mould opinion than leading articles. Whether it was true then is doubtful. It is certainly going to be true that the power of the newspaper to influence mind and imagination—not so much by leading articles as by subtler suggestion—will crumple up whenever it is vigorously countered by voices on the air.

So far Radio has been used for direct propaganda only at moments of political tension. What effect this has had no one can say. Probably not much either way. Both sides have used fly-blown catchwords, stale disputation, have put over political speeches no better nor worse than they deliver on platforms. They have not glimpsed the possibilities of an appeal written especially for listeners in their homes, delivered with quiet but passionate intensity, filled with phrases that will stick.

Nor has wireless news been anything so far but a pale foreshadowing of what it must some day be. The newspaper proprietors, defending their monopoly in the same spirit as that of the four-wheel-cab drivers who opposed motor-cars, have done all they could to limit both its



quantity and character. With this the public have borne patiently, as with other monopolies. But it is not to be supposed that the millionaires will be allowed permanently to suppress the rival threatening their wealth and power.

Nor can we look forward to Socialism being established by orderly, legal means without assuming that wireless will be used as a daily, perhaps hourly, antidote to the efforts which will be made by newspapers to persuade the nation that prosperity is inseparable from capitalism.

Sir Norman Angell, in the course of an argument for a strong Labour Press, pictured vividly some fifteen years ago what was likely to happen—this was before wireless had reached its present stage.

“Imagine a Labour Government coming into power attempting to put into effect even part of its programme. The preliminary dislocation would certainly be very considerable. The story of what the new social order was accomplishing would be told to the nation by groups determined to destroy it. The nation would, in fact, hear nothing of what was well done, only of what was ill done.

“If there was an accident on the nationalized railways, that accident would be the direct result of nationalization. The Government would be murderers. If a child died of diphtheria, ascribed to infected milk, in a town where the supply of milk was municipalized, the Government would be baby-killers. If a Labour member appeared in the Divorce Court, the whole Press would set itself to create the impression that the Government was bent upon destroying all morality and that it was shortly going to introduce a Bill for the Nationalization of Women. If a schoolmaster was accused of some offence against one of his pupils, the Press would print appalling stories of schools under the new Government given over to Satanic orgies.

“The nation would soon forget, of course, that railway accidents sometimes occurred under private ownership; that there were divorce cases in the courts before the Labour Government came into power; that diphtheria was not unknown in English villages before municipalized milk deliveries; that the criminal records previous to the Labour Government’s day contained hundreds of offences by schoolmasters. Educated as we are educated, the vast bulk of our population is incapable of thinking clearly on these subjects. It will take a generation of better teaching before we have a population capable of seeing through this kind of misrepresentation.”

That was written in 1922. Since then two Labour Ministries have held office; no such attacks have been made on them or their measures. Does that show Angell’s forecast to be misleading? Of course not.

Those Labour Ministries caused the Millionaire Press no anxiety. Mr. MacDonald made it quietly known (this can be proved) that nothing drastic would be attempted. Mr. J. H. Thomas promised that Labour Ministers would show themselves fit to rule—like English gentlemen. Lord Snowden accepted everything that Treasury officials and bank of England directors told him. There was no need to misrepresent such men or their measures. Even if they had meant business, they had no power to pass anything the Press Lords did not like.

Very different would be the case of a Socialist Government with a majority giving it power. At once the campaign of misrepresentation would begin. Everything Ministers did or proposed would be distorted, traduced. This was what happened in Russia after the Bolsheviks had begun to rule; in Spain, too, when the United Front Ministry took office. The Soviet leaders left the newspapers,

alone for a time, but were compelled before long to silence their persistent lying.

With wireless at their disposal, British Socialist Ministers would be in a position to give the nation the truth and to answer immediately all their enemies' perversions and mis-statements. At the same time, the controllers of newspapers publishing false news or slanderous comment could be prosecuted under a Defence of the Realm Act and instantly tried, being sent to prison, if convicted, without the option of a fine. There would be no difficulty in discovering who the controllers were.

Another measure of defence would be the enlargement of wireless news bulletins. These could be made to include all that the mass of listeners want to be informed about. No one can look through popular newspapers without discovering that they contain a great deal which people do not want to be informed about. The evening papers especially are made up largely of police-court and inquest reports totally lacking in general interest. It would not be at all difficult to put out a far more attractive budget of Radio news.

As to the mechanics of listening, that is also easy. Some trains already have Radio installations; in time all trains and other public vehicles will be so fitted. No doubt there will be compartments for those who do not want to listen, just as there are for those who do not want to smoke, and as there ought to be for those who do not want to hear annoying chatter.

It is possible, too, that before very long everyone will be carrying about a tiny receiving set with ear-phones; this would make loud speakers unnecessary. Wherever they happened to be, those who wished to hear the news could do so comfortably—far more comfortably than they can read large newspapers, with fellow-passengers pressing all round them, standing in front if they are sitting down, seated in front if they are strap-hanging.

Even in a room, with space and solitude, listening is easier than reading, and experience shows that the easiest ways are taken by ninety-nine out of a hundred people. How many walk if they can ride? How many would trouble to use their eyes for reading newspapers if they could use their ears for hearing a pleasant voice giving them information. Reading is an exertion; listening none at all.

The Press millionaires and their "yes-men" contend that the newspaper habit has too firm a hold to be dislodged. This delusion will crash as soon as it is possible to listen, between seven and ten in the morning and from five to seven at night, to the news of the day varied by music and features. The objection that some listeners might hear the same news twice can be met by varying the words in which it is announced.

Radio news, besides being easier to take in, will be of a sound character. Instead of being doled out to the B.B.C. from a tap controlled by the newspaper proprietors, it will be gathered and prepared by a competent staff of news-men and -women. All items will be presented impartially. Any comment that is offered will come from persons whose names are announced. It will be their own comment; no "ghosts" will concoct it and then go fifty-fifty with the owner of some familiar name. This practice has become all too common in newspapers. A reporter or a free-lance journalist writes an article, the sort of thing a celebrity of the moment might say—perhaps after a short chat with the celebrity. The celebrity agrees to sign it and take half the proceeds—if he or she is greedy, more than half.

Rarely have the celebrities whose opinions the deluded public thinks it is reading anything whatever of their own to say. Most of them sign anything that is put before them; they are glad of the money and they like the advertisement. Thus there occur sometimes comical

mischances. For example, when a German woman athlete visited England the *Sunday Chronicle* published an article by her in which English girls were described as being "very poor at field sports, almost hopeless." Next day in the *Daily Mail* appeared an article by the same lady headed "British Women are the Best Athletes."

Nor will the B.B.C. have any need to hire the names of people momentarily prominent, as the *News-Chronicle* did when it cabled to Scott, winner of an airplane race from Britain to Australia, an offer of a staff post as "Aviation Editor." Another day the contents bill of this paper announced "Lindrum joins *News - Chronicle*," and puzzled persons learned by inquiry that Lindrum was a famous billiards player, and was to write about that game. None of the feverish dodges to attract readers that the purveyors of printed news practise will be transferred to Radio news. It will not be necessary to hold out the lure of "sensations" to induce people to listen.

"Sensation" has superseded "amazing" as the word that is hardest-worked in the popular newspaper's vocabulary. Everything that happens is so described. "Baldwin Sensation" means that someone accused the Prime Minister of not telling the exact truth (as if Prime Ministers ever do!), "City Sensation" is the impending arrest of another financial genius, "Test Team Sensation" concerns some cricketer or other. A few years ago these would have been "Amazing Attack on Baldwin," "Amazing City Rumour," "Amazing Test Team Change." "Sensation" has a more exciting promise in it.

For ingenuity it would be hard to beat an *Express* contents bill of four words :—

WIDOW  
MURDER  
ARREST  
SENSATION.

In this rivalry, however, the popular papers, morning and evening, run neck-to-neck.

Radio news will, moreover, be unaccompanied by anonymous leading articles, professing to contain independent views based on study of the public welfare, but really voicing some millionaire's fad or crazy alarm. That will be a great gain, but greater still will be the value of "undoctored" news.

There is hardly a newspaper to-day which does not in some degree put its own colour on the information it receives and publishes. It may be done boldly. A crime against the honour of journalism was committed by the *Sunday Dispatch* (Rothermere), when it stated that France, after it had voted for a Socialist Cabinet, was dangerously disturbed—a statement there was nothing to justify. As a rule, the colouring is effected more insidiously. During the Fascist rebellion in Spain the sympathies of

"If with the lamp of truth you'd look  
To see things plain and clear  
First you must dam the Beaver brook  
And drain the Rother mere."

—Popular rhyme.

almost the entire London Press were shown by the persistent efforts made to give an impression that the rebels were winning everywhere. This pointed clearly to the line these papers would take if Fascism were attempted in Britain, as no doubt it will be when a Socialist Government, having won a General Election, begins to establish Socialism. But with the help of Radio the attempt can be foiled.

The men and women who collect and prepare news for broadcasting will be civil servants. They will hold their jobs only as long as they obey the rule that their

opinions must never affect their official action. In every branch of the public service a summary clearing-out of any who could not be trusted would have to be undertaken immediately by a Socialist Government in power.

And how will journalists and newspapers be affected by the change which will make wireless the main source of news for the mass of people? Advantageously: that I consider certain.

There will still be a large public for newspapers though not for newspaper advertisements. No doubt advertising will continue on a small scale, but it will not be the staple of the newspaper business. Inflated circulations will be punctured, not only by the dropping-off of uninsured readers, but by the refusal of the community to allow insurance to be given away as an inducement to people to buy advertisement sheets.

When the State takes over the responsibility for every citizen's ill-health or injury by accident, it will not be necessary to buy insurance. Nor would anybody be permitted to sell it. This would bring newspapers back to winning readers by the value and interest of their contents.

The number of them will increase as soon as new ones can be started without half-a-million sterling capital. All sorts of publics will be appealed to. Everyone who wants more of any subject than is given by Radio will find it in his own particular journal. There will be general newspapers for those who seek full and detailed intelligence about world events, local newspapers to give neighbourhood news, sports papers, industrial papers, papers largely devoted to films, theatres, music.

None of them will make much money. Nothing that sells purely on its merits can make much. Huge sales mean that huge numbers are cajoled or badgered into buying. Any article that relies on its intrinsic value must be content to supply a moderate demand. But this

will be no disadvantage. Far better that two million people should support twenty papers with circulations of some hundred thousand apiece than pay their two million pennies to one.

Better for the journalists—that is plain. They do not share in the large profits made by the large circulations. Most of them draw wages as fixed by their Union, whether their employer is making 40 per cent. or nothing.

Some newspapers have actually made nothing, others next to nothing, in quite recent years. They have had to pay Union rates, though. Not many journalists get more than these rates—only the chief executives, who are seldom worth the big salaries they now receive, and who certainly will not receive them when the Press is in a healthier state.

With a great many more jobs going, the newspaper man's life will not be harassed, insecure, uneasy, as it is to-day. Journalism will not be the haphazard, irresponsible affair it has so largely become. Once more its duty and privilege will be to inform and direct opinion. It will offer steady employment, with nothing about it to make newspaper men ashamed of themselves and their calling.

To those who doubt whether newspapers with smaller circulations could keep alive, I would point out that many are doing so. And to any who may fancy that three or four would again command mass support and leave the rest to flicker out, I would also reiterate the fact that the big circulations are not due to the papers which have them being better than others, but to the bribes and publicity by which they impose themselves on the public.

When newspapers are bought for what they contain in the way of reading matter, not for insurance or football pool coupons, or because they give away things (see page 7) or assail the eye from innumerable poster hoardings, they will be pretty much on a level, both in contents and in circulation.



Journalists will then be employed, not to tickle the ears of groundlings, not to assist Advertisement Departments and the businesses of advertisers, but to inform, instruct, and amuse readers who use their minds and will quickly drop a paper if they see they are being played down to.

Thus the change will be better for the public too. To listen is, as I have said, easier for most of us than to read. Yet there will remain a large minority who will still want to read newspapers instead of, or in addition to books. They will find themselves with a far bigger choice. In place of a few popular journals trying their best to be as like each other as they are able to be, there will be many, each with some speciality of its own.

The Press will then be in the hands of men and women with a sense of responsibility to those whom they serve, admitting an obligation to give of their best and to aim high. They will respect the honourable traditions of their craft, yet will refuse to stagnate in old ruts as did the Old Journalists who made the newspaper revolution necessary.

The papers they produce will be smaller in bulk than the present bundles of advertising, with a little reading thrown in; but they may have more to read in them, and will certainly contain more mental nourishment. They may possibly cost more, though it should be within their power to keep the price down to a penny.

None of them will be able to sway the mind, inflame the passions, or distort the imagination of vast numbers of people. But they will, by reflecting events faithfully and discussing them with sincerity as well as knowledge, help to train the intellects and stimulate the generous emotions of those who will be making the future.

No one would contend—not even their controllers—that the newspapers are doing this to-day.